

Book 05 - The Godsword, Bloodviolet

Chapter 1

Linley, too, could feel that his body was now far stronger than it had been in the past. Previously, his body was that of a warrior of the fourth rank, but now, he had suddenly reached the sixth rank. This was the inherent ability of the Dragonblood Warriors. Thinking back to the pain he had just suffered to reach this, Linley couldn't help but shiver.

"Linley, give your Dragonform a test." Doehring Cowart said with interest.

"Boss, give it a test!" Bebe was excited as well.

Linley slightly nodded. He, too, wanted to get a sense of what level of power his body now possessed when under the Dragonform transformation. Immediately, Linley began to exert his control over the Dragonblood battle-qi that had been compressed into a quasi-crystal at the dantian location, below his navel. Suddenly....

One stream after another of black liquid began to flow from his dantian to his body, his limbs, and his bones.

"Rrrrrgh." Letting out a deep growl, Linley watched as a dense layer of small black scales began to sprout on top of his skin, while at the same time, a row of spikes began to appear on his back, and a long, iron-whip-like tail sprouted out from his tailbone.

Compared to the Armored Razorback Wurm, those spikes running along Linley's spine were slightly fewer in number and slightly shorter.

"I feel as though my body is filled with limitless power." Linley couldn't help but begin to grow excited. He felt so incredibly powerful. The Dragonblood Warrior, one of the Four Supreme Warriors of the Yulan continent. He had just begun his training in this area, but he already possessed enormous strength.

The Supreme Warriors really lived up to their name!

"The power I have right now, must be several tens of times greater than the power I had in my human form." Linley stretched out his right arm, which was currently covered with scales, and saw that his fingernails were now as sharp as knives.

Linley suddenly leapt off the ground with a mighty kick...

As fast as a streak of fire, Linley charged into middle of the wide cave, then delivered a powerful blow to the cave wall. With an earth-shaking sound, rocks begin to fall down from the cave walls. His arm pierced all the way into the stone wall, and to Linley, it felt as though it was as easy as piercing his arm into soft mud.

Such incredible power.

“Harrgh!” Letting out a loud, excited shout, Linley lashed out with two mighty kicks at the wall as well, immediately blasting a huge hole into it, causing rocks to rain down from even the ceiling.

With a kick of his legs, Linley sent himself flying in the air...

And then, with his twin fists, Linley gave the cave ceiling a mighty smash.

“Bam!” The ceiling of the cave cracked like the shell of a turtle, and one giant boulder after another began to fall down from the ceiling. But Linley wasn’t afraid in the slightest. These boulders wouldn’t do any harm at all when slamming into his body. The black scales protecting his body right now were far more powerful than even the jadestone armor his Earthguard spell provided.

“Swish!” “Swish!” “Swish!”

Linley’s body transformed into a vicious black blur. Sometimes he would land on the ground, while at other times, he would rise into the mid-air. Sometimes, he would use all of his strength while smashing his legs into the wall with ferocious kicks, while other times he would viciously pummel the cave ceiling with his fists and allow the rocks to fall on his body.

After a while...

Linley landed on the floor, then directly leapt to the tunnel entrance.

“Grandpa Doehring, what do you think?” He asked.

Most people would find it very difficult to accurately assess a warrior’s strength unless a battery of tests was used. Linley, at least, didn’t have the ability to make this assessment. But the highly experienced Doehring Cowart should have been able to estimate his strength through the destructive power he had just unleashed.

“In terms of power alone...you should have just crossed over the threshold of being a warrior of the eighth rank.” Doehring Cowart seemed a bit uncertain. “But your movement speed was very fast. Perhaps you have inherited the high movement speed inherent to Armored Razorback Wyrms. Your speed should be on par with

highly agile warriors of the eighth rank. As for your defensive abilities, there's no way for me to judge at this time, since there was nothing to see."

Linley nodded slightly.

He knew that this Dragonform of his had some sort of connection with the Armored Razorback Wyrms, so it made sense that this Dragonform of his was similar in many ways to the Armored Razorback Wyrms.

"For the Dragonblood Warriors of our clan, the more powerful one is, the less of a difference there is between the three forms. Right now, I'm a warrior of the sixth rank, and so my Dragonform can reach the early eighth rank in power. According to the books that I read, once a Dragonblood Warrior has reached the early ninth rank of power in human form, then in Dragonform, he will possess the power of an early Saint-level combatant. But once his human form reaches the Saint-level, then in Dragonform, he will still only be a Saint-level. His battle ability, however, will be somewhat improved."

Linley was quite clear about the nature and origins of the Dragonform ability.

The purpose of assuming the Dragonform was because early on, a normal human being would not be able to utilize all of the power held within the Dragonblood in his veins. Only after using the Dragonform would they be able to summon forth all of their power.

But once they reached the Saint-level, and had totally mastered and harnessed the effective power of their Dragonblood, then when they assumed the Dragonform, their increase in power would be fairly small.

"Linley. Hurry up and dispose of the corpses of those two magical beasts. The two of them have a Saint-level magicite core and a draconic magicite core of the ninth rank." Doebling Cowart immediately urged.

Linley's heart suddenly shuddered.

Cores of the ninth rank and Saint-level?

Linley knew that the value of a magicite core of the ninth rank was worth up to five million gold coins, an incredible amount of money. In Fenlai City, some of the relatively large clan's entire net worth might be around that much.

But the core of a Saint-level magical beast? That was a priceless treasure.

“Right.” Maintaining his Dragonform, Linley immediately rushed over to the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear’s corpse. Because Linley had caused so much damage to the walls and the ceiling, even the Bear’s corpse had been buried under falling rubble.

With a wave of his black-scale-covered right arm, Linley knocked over ten large pieces of rubble away, revealing the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear’s upper torso and head.

Using his set of two knife-sharp claws, Linley directly tore at the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear’s fur.

“Oooof!” Linley used as much force as he could, but the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear’s fur wasn’t damaged in the slightest.

“Linley, this is a Saint-level magical beast. Even under the effects of the Dragonform, you are only a warrior of the early eighth rank. If you want to split open this Bear’s fur, there’s no way you can do it alone.” Doehring Cowart laughed.

Linley was forced to admit that this was the truth.

“But Linley, look. There’s many sharp spikes on the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear’s body. These spikes are all extremely sharp. Based on your current ability, there’s no way you can use the spikes to cut open the fur either. But there’s a spike located very close to the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear’s eyes. What you need to do is pull that spike out, then stick your claws into that wound and go digging. I’m confident that you should be able to pull out that Saint-level magicite core.” Doehring Cowart instructed.

To the enormous Armored Razorback Wyrms, these spikes were nothing more than spikes!

But to the much smaller Linley, these spikes were like massive drills which were twenty centimeters in length. After pulling the spike out, a huge, gaping wound would be revealed near the eyes of the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear. Going digging for the magicite core through that gaping wound should be an easy task indeed.

After all, as tough as the fur of a Saint-level magical beast might be, its brain and organs weren’t too tough.

Using all his strength, Linley forcibly tugged out the giant ‘drill’, and then extended his black scaly arm into the wound, digging for the magicite core. This Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear’s head was really large as well, over a meter long. Linley had to

extend his arm into the wound all the way past his elbows before he was able to locate and pull out the Saint-level magicite core.

The Saint-level magicite core was still covered in blood and gore.

A black, fist-sized magicite core.

“It actually doesn’t have even a hint of darkness-style aura.” Linley was very surprised. If he hadn’t already known that this fist-sized black stone was the magicite core of a Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear, he would’ve never been able to guess.

“The energy within a Saint-level magical beast’s magicite core is highly dense and reserved. Frankly speaking, the magicite core of a magical beast of the ninth rank is as well.” Doehring Cowart explained.

Linley nodded.

“The entire body of a Saint-level magical beast is a treasure. For example, the leg bones of this Saint-level magical beast definitely possesses an astonishingly resilient strength.” Doehring Cowart let out a sigh. “Unfortunately, you simply don’t have the ability to break through the powerful defensive barrier of its fur.”

Linley also nodded helplessly.

This Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear was simply too huge. He didn’t have the ability to bring the corpse of this Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear back either.

“What a waste.” Bebe said intentionally, off to the side.

Linley chuckled. “We’ve already done quite well. The most valuable part of a magical beast is its magicite core. A single Saint-level magicite core is already a truly priceless treasure. I am already very satisfied at having acquired it. What’s more, I also have a draconic crystal of the ninth rank.” Linley laughed as he walked over to the Armored Razorback Wyrms’ corpse.

The corpse of the Armored Razorback Wyrms had a gaping wound on its head. Finding the draconic crystal shouldn’t be too much of a problem.

Linley plunged his sharp claws directly into the wound on the Armored Razorback Wyrms’ head.

“Eh?”

After carefully sifting around in the Armored Razorback Wyrms' skull for a while, Linley couldn't find anything. This made Linley feel suspicious.

"Why is there no draconic crystal? What bizarreness is this?" Linley frowned.

"Impossible. A magical beast can't be without a magicite core, and this dragon must absolutely have a draconic crystal as well. After a magical beast dies, there's no way that the magicite crystal will disappear." Doehring Cowart couldn't believe it either.

But Linley suddenly remembered something...

Earlier, when he was raging and drinking the dragon's blood of this Armored Razorback Wyrms, he had swallowed an icy cold object into his stomach. But at that time, due to his rage and his sorrow, he hadn't paid it any attention. And then, when he had eaten the Blueheart Grass, the pain in the rest of his body had faded, except for that one place where the object was.

"No way....was that the draconic crystal?" Linley thought to himself.

Linley could still recollect that sensation of having that ice cold object pass through his throat into his stomach.

"I ate a draconic crystal? This...how could this have happened? In the Secret Dragonblood Manual, there only is a discussion on drinking dragon's blood. Can it be that eating a dragon's draconic crystal core also works?" Linley totally didn't know what was going on. But no matter what, it seemed he had indeed swallowed the core, and from the looks of it, he wasn't suffering from any particular bad aftereffects.

Linley chuckled.

"What I ate wasn't just a draconic crystal core. It was five million gold coins." Linley sighed to himself.

"Boss, lu, lu, look!" Bebe's excited voice rang out.

Linley glanced at Bebe, who was standing in the middle of a pile of rubble, staring dumbly up at the ceiling of the cave. Linley immediately left the tunnel and returned to the cave, and also looked up at the ceiling.

"...what is that?"

At the top of the cave, a large, circular black platform had been revealed. This circular black platform had been embedded into the ceiling, and even now, a large

part of it was covered with stone. Clearly...Linley's wild attacks on the ceiling earlier had caused so many rocks to fall down that the circular black platform had been revealed.

Linley wasn't too surprised by the black platform. What did surprise him was....

On the black platform, there was an extremely complicated pattern of magical marks. All sorts of marks were on the platform, and the pattern was complicated to an extreme. Clearly, on the top side of the black platform, there was some sort of magical array formation, but Linley had never, ever, seen such a complicated magical array formation.

If one described the magical array formation covering the front gates of the Ernst Institute as a single 'wind blade', then this mysterious magical formation was the 'Annihilating Tempest' spell.

In particular, in the direct center of this black circular platform, there was a violet-covered sword plunged into the platform.

"This magical formation...how is this possible?" Doehring Cowart appeared by Linley's side as well. Lifting his head up and staring, he said, "Impossible. How could there be a magical formation such as this here, and with this bizarre sword as a focus."

Doehring Cowart, who in the past had always been calm and composed, had now totally been shocked. In his thousand plus years of life, he had never seen such a terrifying magical formation. Although this magical formation was currently dormant and not active, he could already tell what terrible power this magical formation contained.

"Grandpa Doehring, is this magical formation very powerful?" Linley asked.

Doehring Cowart looked at Linley. "Very powerful? We can't even use the word 'powerful' to describe it. The power of this magical formation is even greater than that of any forbidden spell. You tell me, is it 'powerful'? In my entire life, I've never seen such a complicated magical formation, such a powerful magical formation. And what's more, it is borrowing power from that strange sword to supplement the power of the formation itself. What, did the creator feel the power of this formation alone was not great enough?"

Chapter 2

Linley was totally stunned by Doehring Cowart's words.

"Grandpa Doehring was a Saint-level Grand Magus of the era of the Pouant Empire. If even he has never seen such a complicated, powerful magical formation before, and is certain that the power of this formation is even greater than that of forbidden spells, then..." Linley felt a thread of trepidation.

What exactly was this mysterious magical formation doing here?

"Linley, take a closer look and try to get a feel for the formation, as well as that violet longsword." Doehring Cowart said to Linley.

Linley nodded slightly. He immediately gathered wind elemental essence to him and used it to sense the aura of that magical formation and the violet longsword. Closing his eyes, Linley could sense an aura of weight and density emanating from the black platform's magical formation, so heavy and oppressive it was stifling.

At the same time, this black platform, or perhaps the magical formation anchored on the platform, emanated waves of incredibly dense elemental essence.

"No wonder the elemental essence here is so dense, almost a hundred times that of the outside world. So the reason is this." If he hadn't directly and clearly attempted to probe the black platform, Linley wouldn't have been able to understand that the platform was the origin, as the elemental essence constantly came down in waves.

In actuality, the center of the cave was where the elemental essence was the densest.

"Amongst the seven elemental essences, the darkness-type elemental essence is the strongest. No wonder both the Armored Razorback Wurm and the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear both liked this place. Both of them were darkness-type magical beasts." Linley nodded to himself.

"That violet longsword." Linley carefully tried to sense out any details on the violet longsword plunged into the middle of the black platform. "Darkness-type element...but so reserved and introverted."

Stroking his beard, Doehring Cowart smiled at Linley. "Linley, I can tell you something. The value of that violet longsword is most likely not at all inferior to a Saint-level magicite core."

Linley stared at Doehring Cowart questioningly.

Linley knew very well that generally speaking, a warrior's weapons were not very valuable. As long as some extremely hard metals were used along with some other alloys, a weapon could be made. Even his Baruch clan's family heirloom, the warblade 'Slaughterer', only cost a few tens of thousands of gold coins to make.

Afterwards, the successors to the Baruch clan sold the warblade 'Slaughterer' for 180,000 gold coins, but that was primarily because of its connection to the famous Dragonblood Warriors.

Unfortunately, it had been many years since a Dragonblood Warrior had surfaced, and thus the fame of the Dragonblood Warriors was no longer worth as much. If it had been sold in the days when the Dragonblood Warriors had roamed and dominated the lands, the price would have been much higher.

The weapons of warriors weren't worth much. But the magistaff of a magus was a different matter.

The higher quality a magistaff was, the more precious the materials for making it needed to be.

For example, the 'divine treasures' used by a Saint-level Grand Magus, such as a powerful magistaff, would use the magicite core of a magical beast of the ninth rank, or a Saint-level magical beast, to serve as the energy source. Next, complicated and powerful magical formations would be carved onto the magistaff, in order for it to reach its maximum potential.

A magistaff which was hailed as a 'divine treasure' definitely was a priceless treasure. After all, a Saint-level magicite core by itself was considered a priceless treasure.

But of course...

When discussing the relative worthlessness of warrior's weapons, that was with respect to material weapons forged in the Yulan continent. If a weapon came from another place, such as one of the Four Higher Planes, then its value would be different.

"This violet longsword has a very unique aura. If my guess is correct, it should come from one of the Four Higher Planes. Most likely, the Infernal Realm." Doehring Cowart said musingly.

Linley asked curiously, "The Four Higher Planes?"

His white beard fluttering, Doebling Cowart said, "If we consider the Yulan continent as a whole, at your current level of power, you can nominally be considered to be in the upper tier. I can begin telling you a few things now. Linley, you should know by now that in this universe, there is more than just one plane of existence."

Linley nodded. "Of course I know. For example, the Netherworld."

"You know very little." Doebling Cowart shook his head. "In reality, within this vast, infinite universe, there are countless planes, with material, physical planes just one of the most basic, elementary types of planes. Amongst all of these countless planes, there are Four Higher Planes of existence. These planes are the Netherworld, the Infernal Realm, the Life Realm, and the Celestial Realm." Doebling Cowart explained carefully.

Linley attentively listened, as this information was perhaps known only to the absolutely most powerful people of the Yulan continent.

"Linley, by now, you should know what a so-called 'god' is, right?" Doebling Cowart grinned as he looked at Linley.

Linley nodded. "Those who have surpassed the existence of 'Saints' are what we call Deities or Gods." Having read many books, Linley knew that in many books discussing power which transcended the level of the Saints, this level of power was described as the power of the Gods. A power that was so great, it was irresistible.

"Right. But above the level of the Deities, are the Sovereigns. And above the Sovereigns, there are the Overgods!" Doebling Cowart sighed. "These Four Overgods are truly eternal presences which surpass everything else in existence."

This was the first time Linley had ever heard of the existence of the Four Overgods.

"Overgods? Are they more powerful than the Radiant Sovereign?"

"Haha, the Radiant Sovereign?" Doebling Cowart began to laugh. "Regardless of whether we are discussing the 'Radiant Sovereign' of the Radiant Church, or the 'Shadow Sovereign' of the Cult of Shadows, they are nothing more than Sovereigns. To us, and to any ordinary Deity, a Sovereign is an all-powerful entity. But they still require the power of faith from their followers."

"But the Four Overgods are different. They neither require followers, nor require faith. Their power is all-encompassing and all-ruining. Sovereigns such as the Radiant Sovereign or the Shadow Sovereign most likely would only be worthy of

being servants for the Four Overgods. And that would be only if the Overgods found them worthy." Doehring Cowart spoke with absolute certainty.

Linley's heart trembled.

"The Netherworld, the Infernal Realm, the Life Realm, the Celestial Realm. These Four Higher Planes were created by the Four Overgods. In the past, I had once had the chance to sense the aura of these Four Higher Planes, which is why, immediately upon seeing that violet longsword, I felt certain that it hails from the Infernal Realm."

Doehring Cowart stared suspiciously at the violet longsword plunged into the round black platform. "But I, too, am suspicious. How did something from the Infernal Realm come here?"

"Linley, think about it. This is a magical formation which is more powerful than even forbidden spells. For it to rely on this violet longsword as a supplemental source of energy, in terms of energy levels, this sword should at least be on par with this magical formation. I strongly recommend...that you drip your blood on it and see if you can bind it to you." Doehring Cowart's eyes were gleaming.

"Bind it?" In Linley's heart, there arose a desire to acquire this treasure.

"Don't be afraid. No matter what this magical formation is meant to do, for such a huge formation to be activated would take a long period of time. This will give you enough time to run far away. First drip your blood onto it and see if this sword already has a master. If it has no master, you can take it away with you. There definitely won't be a problem, and no one will find out." Doehring Cowart said with absolute confidence.

A divine sword which could be bound with blood was no ordinary thing.

When worn, nobody would be able to tell what it was. In the eyes of others, it would be as ordinary as the Coiling Dragon ring.

"Alright." Linley exerted control over his Dragonblood battle-qi, and instantly, the scales on his arms and his upper body began to vanish.

The second form of the Dragonblood Warriors: the Demidragon form.

Linley could now totally control which portion of his body would transform. The rest of his body was now the same as a normal person. After using his teeth to cut his finger, Linley directly leapt up and flicked that drop of blood onto the violet longsword, which had been there for who knows how many years.

The drop of Linley's blood landed on the dust-covered violet longsword, which had been there for countless years. It absorbed his blood like a sponge, easily drinking it in. At the same time...

"Ting!" That violet longsword rang out with a clear sound, and at the same time began to tremble.

All of the dust stuck to its surface suddenly flew away, and at the same time, a strange, bloody aura began to circulate on top of the sword, as though fresh blood was flowing all around it.

"An item with no master." Seeing this, Doehring Cowart felt surprised and pleased.

Doehring Cowart knew very well that if this sword had a master, then Linley would've had no hope at all. But if the sword had no master, then in the future, Linley would possess an extremely useful tool.

"Linley, quick, pull the sword out, and then immediately get out of this place!" Doehring Cowart urged.

"Got it."

Linley once more leapt up, this time directly grabbing the violet longsword and giving it a powerful tug. "Shrrrring!" With a clear ringing sound which seemed to carry boundless joy, it came out.

Earlier, when Linley's blood had been absorbed by the violet longsword, Linley immediately knew....that this was a flexible sword!

But upon exerting battle-qi, mageforce, or any other sort of force through the sword, it could instantly become firm and rigid! It could be flexible or hard!

Pulling the sword out from the black platform, Linley landed on the ground. As he landed, with the flick of his wrist, Linley wrapped the violet longsword around his waist, using it like a belt!

"Bebe. Let's go."

Picking up his backpack with one hand, Linley immediately ran for the tunnel exit. At the same time, he began to cover his entire body with scales once more. Bebe, as well, instantly jumped atop of Linley's shoulders.

In the Dragonform, Linley possessed the power of a warrior of the early eighth rank. But in terms of speed, he was a match for a particularly fast warrior of the eighth rank.

“Seventh rank Supersonic!” Linley immediately cast the wind-style supportive spell, ‘Supersonic’.

A Supersonic spell cast at the seventh rank could increase the speed of a warrior of the fourth rank by up to three times. However, Linley’s current base speed was already extremely fast, and so even with the assistance of the Supersonic spell, his speed only improved by another 50%.

But even a 50% increase was already a terrifying increase.

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The white fog continued to flow about in the air above the Foggy Valley. As for those giant flying dragons that were previously circling about in the air, aside from a very small number of them still in the air, all of the dragons were now resting on the ground. However, without question, all of them were staying far away from that small hill.

The tunnel covered up by that hill was forbidden grounds!

These giant dragons still remembered how, days ago, that pitiful human had entered the forbidden grounds. Most likely, that pitiful human had died long ago.

“Whoosh!”

A black blur suddenly shot out from within the tunnel, and then directly rocketed into the sky.

“What was that?” Those hundred-plus dragons all noticed the human-sized blur.

A fast warrior of the eighth rank could definitely match the speed of a giant flying dragon of the eighth rank. And now, with Linley utilizing the Supersonic spell to assist himself, his speed had been increased by 50%. Right now, Linley’s speed was definitely on par with a warrior of the ninth rank. Even compared to Bebe, he wasn’t much slower.

“Roar!”

Those hundred-plus dragons immediately began to roar with rage.

A human had actually dared to trespass on the territory of the dragons? One giant dragon after another spread their wings, taking off and chasing after Linley, but Linley's current speed was simply too fast. Even that largest Fire Dragon could do nothing save watch as Linley's form grow farther and farther away from them. In just a short amount of time, Linley had thrown them off and disappeared from their sight.

"That doesn't seem to be a human." That largest Fire Dragon coiled about in mid-air, musing to itself, confused.

Although it hadn't been able to catch Linley, it could tell quite clearly that this creature was human-shaped, but was covered with scales.

"A human-shaped magical beast?" That Fire Dragon wondered to itself.

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Within the underground cave, atop the black platform, the countless crisscrossing lines and patterns of the magical formation slowly began to glow. Each line seemed to have a line of glowing silver emanate from it. Slowly...the entire magical formation began to shine, so brightly as to hurt one's eyes.

"Boom!"

A deep rumbling sound could be heard, and the magical formation began to grow even brighter. Those rumbling sounds grew more and more frequent, more and more urgent. "Boom!" "Boom!" "Boom!" "Boom!" Like a series of drumbeats, those booming sounds continued, and that mysterious magical formation continued to grow brighter.

"CRACK!" That black pavilion, made out of an unknown material, suddenly cracked, with three cracks appearing.

Chapter 3

After the three massive cracks appeared on the round black platform, the light from the entire magical formation suddenly flashed as the drumbeat-like booms reached a crescendo, beating faster and louder.

"BOOM!" "BOOM!" "BOOM!" "BOOM!"

Like a series of unabated thunderclaps, capped off with one final “BOOM!” the entire round black platform exploded into fragments. Naturally, the magical formation atop of it disintegrated as well. Suddenly, one patterned crack in the air itself after another began to appear, clear and visible to the eye, spreading out in all directions.

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While the flying dragons of the Foggy Valley were still busy wondering about that man-shaped aberration, they suddenly felt the ground itself tremble. All of the giant dragons were startled, and immediately spread their wings and took to the air. Just a few moments later...

“BOOOOOM!”

The ground for kilometers around suddenly exploded. That entire hill which had sealed off to the underground tunnel was reduced to smithereens.

“Growl...” A deep roar emanated from underground.

Where the round black platform had been, space itself was suddenly ripped apart like a piece of paper, revealing a gaping hole of nothingness. And from within that hole, stepped forth a handsome, devilish looking young man, wearing a long, dark gold robe and carrying three little kittens in his arms.

At this moment, the young man looked to be in quite bad shape, and his face was covered with blood.

“Whoosh!”

That gaping hole in reality suddenly vanished. The space nearby, however, was still very unstable, and wild bolts of energy would occasionally appear and disappear.

“I...have finally escaped.” The young man stared at the unstable space, a look of wild joy on his face.

“Haha...how many years, now? I’ve finally escaped that damnable place.” Right in the middle of the young man’s forehead, there was a slit that appeared almost like a knife wound. Suddenly, that ‘scar’ opened, revealing a gold-colored third eye.

This golden eye radiated light in every which way.

“This is....this is actually the Yulan continent?” The devilish young man began to laugh in amazement and joy. “This is just wonderful.”

"Father, I'm hungry." One of the little kittens in the young man's arms suddenly said.

"I'm hungry too."

The other two kittens also echoed.

Kittens that could speak?

Could they actually be Saint-level magical beasts?

"Alright. Haha, there's around a hundred or so little dragons flying up ahead. You guys can go and have a good meal." The devilish young man laughed loudly.

"Oooo!"

Those three little kittens began meowing in excitement. Suddenly, they transformed into three bolts of lightning and streaked into the sky. As they flew, their bodies suddenly expanded as well, growing larger and larger...smiling, the devilish young man took a single step, and appeared in the middle of the Foggy Valley.

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Within the Foggy Valley, over a hundred giant dragons were circling in the air. They had no idea as to what caused the earth to explode just then.

"What's that?"

They saw three huge blurs streak into the air above the Foggy Valley. Each of the three creatures were over thirty meters tall and a hundred meters long. They looked like lions, only magnified by several dozen times. But these creatures were not, in fact, lions, because these three creatures each had a pair of enormous wings, and also had six eyes each.

Six eyes, two wings. Physically as large as one of those legendary Behemoth creatures.

But even Behemoths were not as terrifying as these three creatures.

"RAWR!" Those three strange creatures opened their bloody maws wide and let out a mighty roar. Instantly, their mouths seemed to have turned into a vortex, generating an astonishing pulling force towards the flying dragons.

These hundred-plus dragons wanted to flee in terror, but this sucking force was simply far too strong. The strangest thing was, the pull seemed to only affect them, and didn't disturb any of the rocks on the cliffs near them in the slightest.

"Roaaaar!"

Those hundred-plus dragons began to bellow in fear and rage, but in the face of that terrifying attractive force, they were helplessly sucked away. One giant dragon after another fell into the gaping maws of those six-eyed monsters.

The thing which scared the dragons the most was...

The bellies of these monsters seemed to have unlimited capacity. Although the dragons were slightly smaller in size than these monsters, one should be more than enough to fill the stomachs of these monsters. But as soon as one dragon was sucked into a monster's belly, the monster would begin sucking in another.

One dragon....another dragon...

The pulling force from the maws of those three monsters was simply too terrifying. The eight-ranked dragons were totally unable to resist it. One dragon after another was sucked into the bellies of those six-eyed aberrations. In a short period of time, every single one of them had been devoured by these three monsters.

"That was great!" One of the aberrations laughed loudly. "It's been so many years since I've had a proper meal."

"I thought I was going to die in that damnable place and never come out again. Unfortunately...number four and number five..." Another one of the aberrations said with a low sigh.

All three of the aberrations fell silent.

They thought back to the thousands of years they had spent in that damnable place. They couldn't help but feel their hearts grow cold. No future. No hope. They could've died at any time. If it hadn't been for their father, the three of them most likely would've been killed long ago. But even despite the efforts of their father, their fourth brother and fifth brother, the weakest of the five, had both died.

"Father's coming."

The three aberrations watched as that devilish young man walked towards them in midair. Their bodies shrinking, they once again transformed into three ordinary little kittens. The only thing was, their fur was now rainbow-colored and beautiful to

behold. Their two little wings were also much more beautiful than the wings of the dragons.

But those three sets of eyes still would shock anyone who saw them.

“Father.” Those three aberrations excitedly flew to their father’s side. By now, there was no longer a hint of blood on the devilish young man’s face, and the dust on the dark golden robe he was wearing had all disappeared as well. A smile was still on his face.

“Did you have a good meal?” The devilish young man laughed. “Oh, and there’s two more magical beasts of the eighth rank here as well.”

The devilish young man looked towards the west side of the Foggy Valley, while at the same time, a burst of quad-colored energy radiated west. In a short time, the burst of energy had wrapped around those two giant Velocidragons, and pulled them over in mid-air.

Those two Velocidragons seemed to know that the end was nigh. All they did was moan in a low voice, begging for mercy.

They were Velocidragons. Although they were also magical creatures of the eighth rank, like Emerald Dragons and Fire Dragons, due to the fact that they were different races of dragons and also did not fly, they usually stayed far away from the Emerald and Fire Dragons.

When those three aberrations had been happily devouring the flying dragons, they hadn’t paid any attention to those two far-away Velocidragons.

“Over a hundred flying dragons were just devoured.” The hearts of the two Velocidragons were trembling.

Their opponent was far too strong, and those three kittens, now at a ‘normal’ size, could even talk.

“You wanted to flee?” That devilish young man smiled at the two Velocidragons.

The two Velocidragons were physically huge. That devilish young man was just a tiny speck by their side. And yet, the hearts of the two Velocidragons were quailing, and they were panting hoarsely nonstop. In the language of the dragons, they said, “Lord, we wouldn’t dare, we wouldn’t dare.”

The devilish young man seemed to understand the draconic tongue. Smiling, he nodded. "Very good. I've just arrived in this plane, and I'm in a very good mood. I'll spare you two. You two...shall serve me now."

The energy chains around the two Velocidragons disappeared, causing the two of them to land heavily on the ground. Upon smashing into the ground, they traded glances, then immediately prostrated themselves flat on the ground, their heads lowered in a sign of obedience.

Dragons were extremely arrogant creatures, but in the face of such overwhelming power, they had no choice but to submit.

Facing this devilish young man, these two Velocidragons strongly suspected that they could be killed with a single wave of his pinky.

"The Yulan continent." The devilish young man surveyed his surroundings, his face all smiles. "What a wonderful place. I trust that I won't be as unfortunate as I was, five thousand years ago."

.....

Within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.

Having returned to his human form, Linley was only wearing a pair of slacks and an undergarment. This was the beginning of February, when the temperature was extremely low. But Linley was only carefully inspecting the violet sword.

Right now, Linley had no idea what a huge calamity he had unleashed upon the world by pulling out this violet longsword!

The ignorant knew no fear!

But while Doehring Cowart did have some idea as to what would happen, to Doehring Cowart, no matter how great the disaster might be, it wouldn't have too much impact on Linley. After all, even if the heavens collapsed, the ultimate experts of the Yulan continent would be able to stave off calamity. What was there to fear?

Only an idiot would see a treasure there for the taking and not take it.

"Grandpa Doehring, what do you think these two words here mean?" Linley asked Doehring Cowart.

On the hilt of this violet longsword, there were two angular characters, written with many complicated strokes.

"This..." Doehring Cowart's eyes lit up upon seeing these two words. "These words are from the common tongue used in the Infernal Realm. Years ago, shortly after I became a Saint-level magus, I studied this tongue. These two words should be 'blood' and 'violet', respectively."

"Blood Violet?" Linley murmured quietly. "Can it be that the name of this longsword is Bloodviolet?"

Linley carefully inspected this flexible sword, Bloodviolet. Bloodviolet was as thin as a cicada's wings. Precisely because it was so incredibly thin, even though it was made from special materials, it was quite light, perhaps only five pounds or so. To Linley, a five pound sword was absolutely nothing at all.

As he channeled the Dragonblood battle-qi from his body into the sword, Bloodviolet instantly became hard and straight.

With a wave of the hand...

"Swish!" The whisper-thin Bloodviolet very easily sliced through a huge tree with a trunk which would require three men holding hands to surround. Despite being cut through, the tree didn't budged at all. But Linley knew very well that in reality, the tree had been cut into two halves.

But Bloodviolet was too fast, too sharp, which was why the tree didn't move at all.

With a mighty leap, Linley flew into the air, and then kicked at one of the branches of the tree in mid-air. Immediately, the tree began to tremble. After smashing several large branches, the entire tree slowly slid and fell to the ground.

Linley took a glance at the place where Bloodviolet had made its cut. "How smooth." The cut area didn't have any coarseness or any splinters.

"That sword is awesome." Munching on a roast duck he was carrying, Bebe stared with wide eyes.

Linley chuckled, then turned to stare at the flexible sword, Bloodviolet. In his mind, he said, "With such an agile, sharp weapon, even if I encounter a thousand or ten thousand foes, I won't fear them." Linley immediately began to brandish the flexible sword about.

With incredible agility, Linley danced amidst the forest, easily waving Bloodviolet to and fro amongst the trees.

Sharp! Fast!

As thin as an insect's wings! This caused Bloodviolet to be virtually unimpeded by air resistance, allowing its speed to reach terrifying heights. And its lightness allowed Linley to transform even more of his physical strength into a fast swing speed.

"Linley, although this flexible sword, Bloodviolet, is quite sharp, its sharpness isn't all that shocking." Doehring Cowart's appraising skills were much better than Linley's. At one glance, he could tell what the true strength of this Bloodviolet sword was.

Linley couldn't help but stare suspiciously at Doehring Cowart.

Doehring Cowart laughed. "If you just want to use this Bloodviolet sword to chop down an ordinary tree, then of course it would be unstoppable. But in facing an expert opponent, such as a warrior of the seventh rank using a shield infused with battle-qi, I'm afraid you wouldn't be able to cut through it so easily."

Linley was startled.

"The true value of this Bloodviolet longsword lies in two different areas. The first is that it can be either firm or flexible, and thus it would be extremely hard for an opponent to defend or protect against it in battle. And the second is....its durability! Most weapons aren't able to withstand too much battle-qi, as they would crumble. But this precious sword of yours will not." Doehring Cowart explained.

Linley nodded slightly.

A sword that was very sharp and very hard probably would also be fragile and unable to take too much force. This Bloodviolet flexible sword was very sharp, but not ridiculously so. Its true strength lay in it being both flexible and firm, while possessing astonishing speed and innate durability.

"Speed? Flexibility?"

Linley's heart was moved. He no longer channeled his Dragonblood battle-qi into the sword, and instead began to channel his wind-element mageforce into it.

At the same time, he began to brandish the sword about. After having been filled with wind-style mageforce, the already fast Bloodviolet sword was able to reach an even higher level, while also the trajectory of its movement became erratic and unpredictable. The sword was sometimes straight, sometimes curved, causing one to not know how to handle it.

Linley instantly understood.

“For me right now, this is perhaps the most suitable way to utilize this flexible sword, Bloodviolet!”

Chapter 4

Shortly after the Ernst Institute began the new school semester, Hillman arrived at the Ernst Institute in search of Linley.

In front of the Ernst Institute’s main gate, Hillman was frowning while pacing. Clearly, he had a belly full of bad thoughts. The Ernst Institute was under very strict management, and as an outsider without any particular status or power, he didn’t have the qualifications needed to enter.

After a while, Yale and Reynolds, both dressed in sky-blue robes, stepped out and walked towards him.

“You are Linley’s Uncle Hillman, right? I met you before.” Yale spoke out warmly.

Hillman had previously seen Linley’s three bros before. Upon seeing Yale and Reynolds, he immediately went over and asked them, “Hey...I know that you are classmates with Linley, and I wanted to ask, why didn’t Linley come back to celebrate the New Year? Every year in the past, he would come back.”

“Uh...” Yale and Reynolds exchanged glances.

That Linley had his heart broken wasn’t a happy event. It wouldn’t be good for them to reveal it to Linley’s elders.

Reynolds reaction speed was the fastest. Smiling, he said, “Uncle Hillman, Linley’s totally focused on his training, and long before the end-of-the-year examinations, had already reached the rank of magus of the sixth rank. And then, he once more entered the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts for training. Man, he’s so hard-working...he didn’t even bother coming back for the yearly examinations. That Dixie fellow was assessed as a magus of the sixth rank this year. Some people are now saying that Dixie has surpassed Linley.”

“Third Bro has no care for these superficial things. Right, Uncle Hillman, Linley headed off to the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts last December. He should be back very soon. Is there something important? If there is, you can tell us. We’ll definitely let him know when he’s back.” Yale said very courteously.

Hillman was silent for a while, then shook his head, a smile on his face that didn't seem like a smile. "No...nothing important. It was just that Linley had always come back every year, and so this year, when he did not, the family grew worried and wanted to check up on him. Since we now know that Linley has entered the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, we're satisfied."

"Uncle Hillman, don't worry, when Third Bro comes back, I'll definitely tell him to go home early so that you won't be worried." Yale immediately said.

Hillman shook his head. "No need, no need to rush him back. Let him focus on his training. When he has some free time, he can come back then. Nothing big is going on back home anyways. Thanks, the two of you. I'll head off now."

Watching Hillman depart, Yale and Reynolds smiled, then turned to leave as well.

Suddenly...

"Young master Yale, young master Reynolds!" From far away, an exceedingly friendly voice called out.

Yale and Reynolds turned to stare outside of the Institute. From far away, they could see a parked carriage guarded by four armored knights. Frowning, Yale said questioningly, "Who is calling out to me? Oh. It's Austoni." Yale saw Austoni poke his face out of the carriage.

Austoni was the first out of the carriage. He smiled humbly at Yale, and then respectfully stood off to the side. At this time, the screen door to the carriage was once more pushed open, and a very distinguished-looking bald gentleman with a cane slowly made his way out.

Yale and Reynolds exchanged glances.

"Who is this old geezer? Seems distinguished." Reynolds said beneath his breath.

Yale shook his head. Also beneath his breath, he said, "I don't recognize this old geezer either. But based on Austoni's actions, he should be an important individual. Austoni is a high level manager at the Proulx Gallery who has fairly high status himself."

Accompanied by Austoni, that distinguished looking old man walked over to them, smiling.

“Little Yale, hello.” The bald man smiled as he spoke to Yale. “I ran into your father not long ago. Your father was full of praises for you. Haha, for Mr. Dawson to have a son such as yourself at the Ernst Institute is a very proud thing.”

Yale looked questioningly at the bald man.

“He says he knows my father? And seems to be close to him?”

Austoni said from the side, “Young master Yale, this is the managing director of our Proulx Gallery. You can call him Director Maia [Mai’ya].”

“No need, just call me Uncle Maia. I’ve been friends with your father for decades.” The bald old man said with a smile.

Yale felt secretly shocked.

The Proulx Gallery was the holy land for the arts. Every single large city in the Yulan continent had a branch of the Proulx Gallery. Even here at Fenlai City alone, the total value of all the sculptures stored at the local Proulx Gallery would come to an astounding figure.

And that wasn’t the half of it.

The most important thing was status. To be the managing director of the holy land for the arts meant that the circle this Director Maia travelled in composed of the highest tier of people in the entire Yulan continent, and he might even be on friendly terms with Saint-level combatants. How could anyone look down upon someone like this?

What’s more, the Proulx Gallery had a extremely formidable armed force, as otherwise, how could they protect their valuable treasures?

“Uncle Maia.” Yale said humbly.

The bald Director Maia turned to look at Reynolds. “And this is?”

“This is a good bro of mine – Reynolds.” Yale immediately replied. Quite elegantly, Reynolds also said, “Very pleased to meet you, Director Maia.”

Director Maia nodded slightly. From Reynolds movements, he could tell that Reynolds had received excellent tutelage from when he was young.

“Uncle Maia, why have you come here, if I might ask?” Yale asked.

Although he was asking, in his heart, Yale already suspected the answer. “80% chance he’s here because of that sculpture of Third Bro – Awakening From the Dream.” The last time the Ernst Institute had a holiday break, due to the fact that it had been quite some time since Linley had sent any sculptures to the Proulx Gallery, Austoni had come over to see what the situation was.

But upon arriving at Linley’s dormitory, by chance, Austoni had caught a glimpse of that sculpture, which they had placed in the dorm.

Upon seeing it, Austoni had been totally stunned.

As a high level manager of the Proulx Gallery, Austoni’s eyes were exceedingly sharp. From that glimpse, he was absolutely certain that this sculpture of Linley’s was qualified to be described as standing at the pinnacle of the entire art of stonesculpting. It definitely was qualified to stand on the same pedestal as the Ten Great Sculptures.

The most important thing was, this sculpture of Linley’s was enormous, on par with five separate sculptures of most people.

Just like in the art of painting, the value of a sculpture was related in part to its size. Such an enormous sculpture would’ve required an incredibly large amount of effort. This sculpture which contained five lifelike images of people had already contained within it a unique soul and was on a totally different level.

Seeing that sculpture was the same as seeing five real-life beautiful women.

In the entire Yulan continent, there were very few master-level sculptors. But this sculpture by Linley had already surpassed the level of ‘masters’; it was qualified to be ranked amongst the works of the most venerated grandmaster sculptors in history, such as Proulx, Hope Jensen [Hu’pe Jin’sen], and Hoover [Huo’fu].

Those who were granted the title of master were able to produce sculptures of exceedingly high quality, with their own distinct aura and the ability to stir the soul of the viewers.

But their works, when compared to the works of Proulx, Hope Jensen, and the other sculptors who had received the title of ‘Grandmaster’, was still slightly inferior. Although the gap was very small, it still determined a difference in status.

Stonesculpting had a history of hundreds of thousands of years, and during that period of time, the vast majority of sculptures had been destroyed by the passage of time. Only a few special statues made of special materials could survive and be

passed down to the present generation. Thus, of the so-called Ten Grandmasters, nine of them lived within the past hundred thousand years.

Ever since the Yulan Empire unified the Yulan continent, there had been only two sculptors that could be put on the same level as those ancient grandmasters: Proulx and Hope Jensen.

Hoover was a Grandmaster from over a hundred thousand years ago, and his famous sculpture, the Bloody-eyed Maned Lion, had survived all those years due to the unique properties of the material it was made from, thus ensuring Hoover's fame would live on.

In the past ten thousand years, there had only been two Grandmaster sculptors. Now, of course, Proulx was actually the most formidable sculptor in all of history, and three of the Ten Masterpieces belonged to him. Not all of the Ten Grandmasters had produced sculptures which numbered amongst the Ten Masterpieces.

Of course, this was just the judgment of the later generations. In terms of actual sculpting ability, all of the Ten Grandmasters were about the same.

A new Grandmaster had been born...and he was a 17-year old youth!

What an amazing event this was! And this was the reason why the managing director of the Proulx Gallery himself had hurried over here, all the way from the Proulx Gallery located in the Dark Alliance.

"No rush. Let's go to a private room in a hotel and have a nice, quiet chat." Director Maia wasn't in too big of a rush.

A Grandmaster sculptor?

What a joke!

Although Austoni's eyes were keen, whether or not a sculpture was capable of being passed down the ages required extremely formidable judgment. The work of a master sculptor and that of a Grandmaster lay in its unique aura and soul.

Whether or not a work of art was qualified to be considered a Grandmaster-level piece of art was an extremely deep field of study.

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Within a deluxe room at the hotel.

In front of the four of them, there was a kettle of light tea. Laughing, Director Maia said, "This kid, Austoni, upon seeing Linley's sculpture, insisted that it was on par with the Ten Masterpieces. Haha, isn't that the same as saying that we now have a seventeen year old Grandmaster?"

'Grandmaster' was a title representing a certain status, representing that someone was at the peak of this art form.

But in casual conversation, most people would address someone as 'master', for example, 'Master Proulx'.

"Grandmaster sculptor?" Yale was somewhat amazed. "I don't know if Linley's sculpture qualifies or not. After all, my experience is limited. But I am absolutely sure that this sculpture of Linley's is, at the very least, comparable with the sculptures you have on display in your hall of the masters."

"Oh?" Director Maia laughed. "Well-spoken. After all this chitchat, I suppose it's best I take a look. I don't know where this sculpture is. May I take a look?"

"Of course." Yale smiled.

"Little Yale, even if this sculpture isn't at the level of the Ten Masterpieces, I'll wager it isn't too far off. You have to protect it and make sure it isn't stolen." Director Maia reminded.

Yale confidently said, "Uncle Maia, please set your mind at ease. Right now, I've secreted the sculpture into the secret underground room within the Huadeli Hotel, and I have experts of the Dawson Conglomerate protecting it. What's more, there are very few people who even know of the existence of this statue to begin with."

"You've moved it to the hotel?" Austoni was somewhat surprised. The last time he saw it, it was in their dormitory.

Yale pursed his lips. "I trust my bros, but I don't trust you."

Austoni could only let out a few awkward chuckles.

"Uncle Maia, let's go. I'll lead you there." Yale said warmly.

The Huadeli Hotel was actually a property under the banner of the Dawson Conglomerate. This was the reason why the upper-level management of the Huadeli Hotel knew Yale's status."

With a large stand-alone room inside the Huadeli Hotel, there were several seats as well as three experts who had been standing guard every day.

“Young master Yale.” The three warriors of the seventh rank bowed respectfully.

Yale nodded and smiled slightly. “Uncle Maia, please view to your heart’s content.” As he spoke, Yale gave a sharp tug to the heavy covering over the sculpture, revealing the enormous work of art. Those five beautiful women were incomparably immaculate and fine. One an image of tender love, another an adorable innocence, a third all bashful and shy, the fourth passionate and stirring, and the last...heartless.

All of them seemed to be as real as an actual person.

Seeing these five human shapes within the sculpture, Director Maia’s mouth hung open, and he stared at it, stunned, for a long time.

After a long time...

“Incredible. Incredible.” Only now did Director Maia awaken from his stupor. “This sculpture is at the master level, at the very least. A sculpture which links together five different human figures, all totally lifelike? How much effort did this cost? In terms of carving time alone, at least a year must have been spent on it.”

Director Maia knew very well how much effort sculpting took.

It took so much effort that sometimes, in the middle of carving a sculpture, a master sculptor might suddenly vomit blood and pass out from the exertion. In history, there were people who died in the middle of their sculpting. Sculptures such as this were formed from blood and effort.

“For a seventeen year old to be able to produce this sculpture is simply...simply...” Director Maia was at a loss for words. He excitedly walked closer to the sculpture for a closer examination. “Whether or not this sculpture is on par with the Ten Masterpieces requires further inspection from multiple angles.”

As he spoke, Director Maia glued himself next to the sculpture, beginning to carefully inspect every single carved line.

Chapter 5

Without making any sound, Director Maia carefully inspected every single inch of this sculpture, *Awakening From the Dream*, as though he had been possessed.

"Boss Yale, it's been two hours already." Reynolds looked at Yale with an unhappy expression.

Yale shook his head and said softly, "Don't be impatient. Let Uncle Maia do a close inspection. As the managing director of the entire Proulx Gallery, he must be one of the descendants of Master Proulx himself. I believe that his abilities at judging sculpture must be extremely high. I wonder what level this sculpture of Third Bro's has reached."

Reynolds nodded slightly as well.

After over three hours had passed, Director Maia straightened his waist, letting out a long breath.

"I hear that the name of this sculpture is, Awakening From the Dream?" Director Maia asked.

Yale nodded. "Correct. Third Bro gave it this name himself."

Director Maia let out a soft sigh. After taking another good look at the sculpture, he praised, "I must say, this brother of yours, Linley, is without question a genius sculptor. A genius who is comparable to Master Proulx himself."

"Although on a technical level, his sculpture is just a tiny bit weaker than Master Proulx's, in terms of the soul or the aura of this sculpture, Linley has definitely reached the same level." Director Maia sighed with praise.

"Technical level?" Yale said questioningly.

Director Maia nodded. "Right. But although this sculpture does have minor technical flaws, at the same time, it has amazing strengths of its own."

"The flaws are, some of the indentions and some of the soft lines were not handled with perfect adroitness. But this sculpture of Linley's is extremely smooth and flowing as a whole, and the feelings it invokes are definitely on par with several of Master Proulx's finest. And most importantly of all, this sculpture is huge."

Director Maia sighed in praise. "For a sculpture to pass down throughout the ages, in every single aspect, it requires a tremendous amount of effort. A single error can ruin the entire sculpture. To be able to sculpt a single human-shaped sculpture is already quite an accomplishment. But Linley was able to sculpt five! The most admirable thing is that all five of the people in this sculpture have their own unique aura, but yet everything is still linked up in a story. If I guess correctly, your brother must have suffered a romantic heartbreak."

Based on Director Maia's astuteness, he could clearly tell at a single glance the story behind these five figures.

"Awakening From the Dream. It is really amazing that Linley was able to carve a sculpture such as this." Director Maia couldn't stop praising it.

"Director Maia, tell me, what level is this sculpture of my bro at, exactly? Is it on par with the sculptures of Master Proulx?" Reynolds asked.

Director Maia frowned. "To be frank, I'm not sure either. Let me put it to you like this. On the technical side of things, this sculpture can only be considered to be an expert level sculpture, despite being on the same level with Master Proulx in terms of invoking emotions and telling a story. But there is a unique point about it..."

"The carving strokes of this sculpture were very clean, very agile. From start to finish, it can be said that these five figures were inseparable parts of a flawless whole. This unconventional feeling is something I have never even heard of before, much less seen." Director Maia praised.

Yale said urgently, "Uncle Maia, so what level is this sculpture at?"

Director Maia was helpless. "I can't say for certain. From a traditional evaluation standpoint, this sculpture should be considered to be on the master level. After all, the uniqueness of its aura is unquestionable, and the quality of the work is on clear display from the grace the statue emanates."

"From a traditional evaluation standpoint?" Yale and Reynolds both looked questioningly at Director Maia.

Director Maia nodded. "The traditional evaluation method has been universally agreed upon as a fair, impartial evaluating mechanism for countless years. But I feel that...when actually viewing Linley's sculpture, it appears to be a very perfect whole, without any apparent flaws."

"The whole point of having sculptures is for viewing them. The actual viewing determines everything. Let me put it this way. Linley perhaps cannot be termed a Grandmaster sculptor, but the value of this sculpture will most likely be incredibly high, on the same level as the Ten Masterpieces." Director Maia laughed.

A sculpture not produced by one of the Ten Grandmasters with the valuation on the same level as the Ten Masterpieces. This was something totally unheard of.

But Director Maia couldn't help but to admit that this was very likely to occur.

“Oh.” Yale and Reynolds nodded.

This was the one flaw of the Straight Chisel School, honestly speaking. When just using a single tool, the straight chisel, in terms of precision when carving out certain curves, couldn’t match some more specialized tools. The technical appearance created by Linley’s usage of the straight chisel was perhaps comparable with a normal expert sculptor.

When judging it against the standards of a master sculptor, the weaknesses became readily apparent.

But the Straight Chisel School had its own strengths as well. For example, the continuity of the carving, and...others, when carving, had to constantly switch tools, but the Straight Chisel School only required an earth-style magus to become one with the earth as he carved, which actually increased the speed at which he raised his spiritual energy.

“Where is Linley?” Director Maia asked.

Yale shook his head. “Third Bro is a student magus, after all. The vast majority of his time is spent in training. Right now, he is engaging in a practical excursion in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, and we’re not sure exactly when he’ll be back.”

“Then, Yale, can you act on behalf of Linley in permitting our Proulx Gallery to auction off this sculpture?” Director Maia suggested.

“Can’t be done.” Yale was very blunt. “Without Third Bro’s express permission, it isn’t convenient for me to make that decision.”

Director Maia frowned, and continued. “Then what about exhibiting it? There shouldn’t be too much of a problem in allowing our Proulx Gallery to exhibit it, would there? After all, Linley’s previous sculptures were all exhibited in our Proulx Gallery before being auctioned off.”

But Yale knew very well how much symbolic importance Linley placed on this sculpture.

This represented an extremely painful period of heartbreak in Linley’s life. It was hard to say if Linley would have agreed to exhibit it if he were here. He didn’t want to make Linley uncomfortable.

“Can’t be done. I’m only responsible for safeguarding this thing. As far as exhibiting it or selling it, we’ll have to wait for Third Bro to return.” Yale’s voice was resolute.

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Within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.

Exactly two months had passed. During this time, Linley had been immersed in studying the Bloodviolet sword. The Bloodviolet sword was the finest sword Linley had ever seen. Just based on its sharpness alone, most magical beasts of the sixth rank couldn't handle it. But the sharpness was only a small specialty of the Bloodviolet sword.

The strengths of the Bloodviolet sword were – Unpredictability, speed, and also a certain baleful aura.

That's right. A baleful aura.

Linley only discovered this baleful aura after killing quite a few magical beasts. The material making up this Bloodviolet sword contained within it a unique energy. With each chop of the blade, a unique baleful aura was released.

This baleful aura was very similar to a dragon's terrifying presence. Naturally, it wasn't nearly as terrifying, but in battle, this baleful aura could be put to very good use.

Night. In the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, surrounded by a pack of hundreds of Windwolves. The Windwolf pack leader stared at Linley with its greenish-yellow eyes. Letting out wild howls, one Windwolf after another pounced towards Linley. But moving as agilely as the wind, Linley slipped through the attacks of the pack, the sword in his hand glowing with a blue light.

After being activated by wind-style mageforce, the Bloodviolet Godsword's speed increased even more. The Godsword flickered about, not impeded by air resistance in the slightest.

"Whoosh!"

Within the darkness, a streak of violet intermixed with blue was flickering about at high speed. It floated about in bizarre patterns, and every time it flickered, a Windwolf was split into two parts. Windwolves, after all, were only magical beasts of the fourth rank. In this pack of Windwolves, some of the stronger ones were beasts of the fifth rank, and only the two leaders were beasts of the sixth rank.

Right now, Linley remained in human form, in which he possessed the power of the sixth rank.

Frankly speaking, even a warrior of the seventh rank might not dare to directly fight with a pack of hundreds of Windwolves, much less a warrior of the sixth rank. After all, a hero could still be brought down by numbers, and Windwolves possessed extremely sharp claws. Even Linley's body, when scratched by a Windwolf, would most likely bleed. Unless, of course, he entered the Dragonform.

"Howl!" A Windwolf leapt at him with high speed, bloody maw wide open.

"Swish!"

The Bloodviolet Godsword flashed. The Windwolf was instantly bisected from head to tail.

"Perhaps this Bloodviolet Godsword of mine would have some problems piercing the armor of a Velocidragon. But you guys?" The Bloodviolet Godsword in Linley's hands was beginning to move even faster and even more agilely.

The reason why a pack of Windwolves was a terrifying thing was because of their speed as well as numbers. If over ten Windwolves suddenly snapped at you, even a warrior of the seventh rank would be hard pressed to block them all at once. His only option would be to use his battle-qi to tank the blow.

But Linley was different.

"Swish!" The Bloodviolet Godsword flashed again, and yet another Windwolf was cut in twain.

The Bloodviolet Godsword was simply too fast, so fast that all the Windwolves could see was a blur. After Linley had slaughtered over a hundred Windwolves without suffering any injury at all, the pack of Windwolves finally began to be filled with fear.

They weren't afraid of death, but they weren't willing to die senselessly either.

"Hooooowl!" Those two large Windwolves that had been hiding in the back finally began to howl angrily. All of the remaining Windwolves lowered their heads, then turned and retreated at high speed. Their angry, saddened howls could be heard from far away. Clearly, it was caused by the fact that they had lost so many of their comrades, but no gain at all.

With a flick of Linley's wrist and a violet flash, the Bloodviolet Godsword wrapped around Linley's waist into a belt shape again.

“Against the likes of them, there’s no need to use Bloodviolet’s real power.” There was a hint of blood on Linley’s robes, but all of it came from the Windwolves.

During the entire battle, from start to finish, the Bloodviolet Godsword had been straight. Against the likes of a Windwolf pack, just relying on the sharpness of the Godsword was already enough. But once the Bloodviolet Godsword began to fluctuate between being straight and being flexible, the offensive power would multiply.

“Boss, you are starting to get more and more powerful.” Bebe was lying on Linley’s shoulders.

Linley laughed. “You aren’t weak either.”

After taking a deep breath then releasing it, Linley glanced around at his surroundings, then took a look at the three bags on his back. In the past two months, through analyzing and training with this Bloodviolet Godsword, Linley had already filled up three sacks with magicite cores.

“After spending two months in training, I’ve already reached a bottleneck in my ability to use Bloodviolet. If I want to get better, for now, I’d have to rely on improving my own arm strength and wrist strength.”

During these two months, Linley had trained in the movements of drawing the sword, striking with the sword, cutting with it, stabbing with it, hacking with it, and all sorts of other skills. The purpose of Linley’s training was all to improve his speed, to as high a level as was possible. What’s more, with Linley’s proficiency in wind magic, Linley could with relative ease discern the secrets of using the sword.

Just now, when faced with over a hundred Windwolves, Linley wasn’t injured at all. This was the result of his accomplishments.

In the past, Linley wouldn’t have dared to imagine what it would be like, at this level.

“Now that I’m at a bottleneck, there’s not much more point to me being at the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. Time to go back.”

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Morning. The early rays of the sun shone upon the earth. With Bloodviolet wrapped around his waist, carrying three sacks of magicite cores, and wearing a slightly blood-stained blue robe, Linley arrived at the main entrance to the Ernst Institute, Bebe on his shoulders.

“Finally back.” Seeing the main gate to the Ernst Institute, Linley felt his heart was at peace.

The Ernst Institute and the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts were two opposite extremes. Here, no one dared to kill wantonly, and everyone was amiable. But the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts was a world which belonged to magical beasts. The strong were revered, while the weak were cast out. Murder could happen at any time.

“It’s Linley.” The guardians at the main gate of the Ernst Institute all recognized this famous figure, Linley. Naturally, they would not stop him.

Linley slightly nodded towards the guards, and then walked into the Ernst Institute. On the roads within the Institute, quite a few students on their way to classes began to talk amongst themselves in hushed tones when they saw Linley.

“Look, it’s Linley. He’s covered in blood. He should’ve just gotten back from the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. I heard that last year, he went to the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts and skipped the end of the year assessment. This has been four months. He’s so amazing, to be able to survive there for four full months.”

“Dixie was assessed as a magus of the sixth rank last year. But Linley didn’t go for an assessment at all.”

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Hearing these hushed murmurs, Linley only smiled as he headed towards his own dormitory. Right at this moment, Yale, George, and Reynolds were preparing to breakfast together.

“Oh, Third Bro, you’re back.” Reynolds was the first to excitedly call out to him.

Yale, George, and Reynolds all excitedly rushed over to him. Linley, as always, grinned upon seeing his three bros.

Chapter 6

Within the Huadeli Hotel.

Linley, George, Yale, and Reynolds were all casually seated at a long table, which was covered with over ten exquisitely prepared dishes. Next to the dishes were fruit

wine, liquor, and more. Right now, the four bros were drinking wine while casually chatting about recent events.

“Linley, last year, you should’ve attended the end of the year testing ceremony before going to the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. Last year, during the examination, Dixie showed that he had also reached the sixth rank. But you didn’t attend at all. Some people are saying that you are inferior to Dixie. Damn. Only the four of us know that you reached the sixth rank long ago.” Reynolds grumbled.

Linley drank a cup of wine, chuckling.

Magus of the sixth rank?

Ever since he entered that rare state of oneness and carved out the sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, over the course of ten days and ten nights, his spiritual energy had increased tenfold, helping Linley to vault almost directly from the sixth rank to the seventh rank.

In fact, just looking at spiritual energy, Linley would be an above-average magus of the seventh rank.

“Fourth Bro, you should know by now that Third Bro doesn’t care about this sort of stuff at all. If he cared, then he wouldn’t have skipped the annual competition every year.” Yale chortled. “Right, Third Bro, when this school semester just started, your Uncle Hillman came looking for you.”

Linley started. Looking at Yale, he immediately asked, “What did Uncle Hillman want?”

In the past, Linley had always gone home for the New Year. This previous year was the first and only year in which Linley spent the end of the winter and early spring in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.

“Not really. Most likely, he was wondering why you didn’t go back for the New Year and was worried something had happened to you.” Yale said casually, then added, “Right. Something else we have to tell you. That same day your Uncle Hillman came to visit, the managing director of the Proulx Gallery came as well. The purpose of his visit was to see sculpture of yours, ‘Awakening From the Dream’.”

Linley coughed in shock. “The managing director? How did he know about ‘Awakening From the Dream’?”

Somewhat embarrassed, Reynolds said, “It’s all my fault. When Yale instructed people to carry your sculpture out of the mountain, I figured nobody knew how

valuable it was, so I just had them leave it in our dormitory. That way, we bros could admire it from time to time. But I didn't expect that Austoni would come looking for you, and came directly to our dorm. He managed to catch a glimpse of 'Awakening From the Dream', and then he informed the managing director of the existence of this sculpture."

Linley nodded slightly.

"Linley, the managing director wants to know if you'd be willing to auction off your sculpture within the Proulx Gallery? If you aren't willing to auction it off, he still hopes that you would be willing to put it on display in the Proulx Gallery. Will you agree?" Yale looked at Linley.

Without hesitating in the slightest, Linley shook his head.

"For now, I don't wish to publicize the existence of 'Awakening From the Dream'. And I don't need money either."

To Linley, 'Awakening From the Dream' represented a period of love and loss. But of course, after completing this sculpture, Linley had mentally transformed as well.

Especially during this period of time within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. He had experienced the siege of over a hundred giant dragons, then watched two extremely powerful magical beasts battle to the death, and then nearly died himself before successfully drinking dragon's blood and transforming into a Dragonblood Warrior.

After having experienced so much, the affairs of him and Alice seemed to be nothing more than a distant memory.

Linley had also learned to cherish the present.

"If Father knew that I could now assume Dragonform, how excited must he be?" Linley thought of his father.

Hogg's greatest lifelong desire was to see one of his son's become a Dragonblood Warrior. Little Wharton's density of Dragonblood in his veins was sufficiently high, true, but Linley was capable of Dragonform, and even of reaching the eighth rank of power in Dragonform.

If this news reached Hogg, that his son had become a Dragonblood Warrior, he would be bursting with pride, no doubt.

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Linley could guess as to how much this sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', would be worth. He also knew very well that storing such an enormous sculpture in Wushan township would not be safe. This was why he asked Yale to help him safeguard this sculpture.

To the enormous Dawson Conglomerate, this was nothing but a trifle.

After leaving the hotel, Linley and his bros were walking on the Shady Grove Street.

"Boss Yale, Second Bro, Fourth Bro. There's something that I must inform you about." Linley spoke after a period of silence.

Seeing how serious Linley looked, Yale, George, and Reynolds all focused their attention on him.

"Within these next few days, I intend to apply for graduation." With difficulty, Linley forced out these words.

Graduating meant leaving the Ernst Institute and leaving his three bros behind. Linley had entered the Ernst Institute when he was nine years old. He was now seventeen. He had spent eight years here. Friends made during these innocent years, without any consideration of gain or ulterior motives, would always be true, genuine friends.

Linley couldn't bear to part from his bros.

But in life, one must have some accomplishments. Upon graduating, he would have the chance to begin to gain titles, writs of nobility, a fiefdom, and perhaps an army. By then, he would be able to advance himself in leaps and bounds.

"Graduate?"

Yale, George, and Reynolds were all stunned. Yale was the first to recover. "Third Bro, why are you in such a hurry to graduate? What's the big deal about graduating from the Ernst Institute early anyhow? Isn't it great, we four bros being together here? And the Ernst Institute is far more peaceful than the outside world."

George and Reynolds also hurriedly tried to dissuade Linley.

Linley shook his head. "Nah. We can't always be hiding within the walls of the Ernst Institute and not interact with the outside world."

"Third Bro, right now, you are only a magus of the sixth rank. Although a magus of the sixth rank is considered an expert in the outside world, there's many people who

are stronger than you. How about...you wait until you reach the seventh rank, and then you graduate." George suggested.

Based on what George knew, there were two major hurdles for a magus to overcome in his training. The biggest hurdle, of course, was crossing from the ninth rank to the Saint-level. But the second biggest hurdle was from the sixth rank to the seventh rank.

From the ninth rank to the Saint-level, even if one had sufficient spiritual energy and had a powerful reserve of mageforce, one could still spend countless years without being able to break through that last hurdle. It was something which required luck and opportunity, a stroke of luck which allowed someone to suddenly comprehend the way.

And from the sixth to the seventh ranks, even geniuses would normally need ten or so years.

"I am already a magus of the seventh rank." Linley told them directly.

"A magus of the seventh rank?"

The three bros of Linley stared at him, seemingly thunderstruck. Even a genius such as Dixie only became a magus of the sixth rank upon turning sixteen. If he worked extremely hard, perhaps when he was around thirty years of age, he would reach the seventh rank.

But Linley...

Linley was only seventeen years old!

"Third Bro, did you just say that you've reached the seventh rank?" Yale couldn't believe it at all.

"Third Bro, you better not be tricking us." George was also in disbelief.

Reynolds was silent. He only stared at Linley, not saying a word.

"Squeak squeak!" Bebe, on Linley's shoulders, began to squeak excitedly towards Linley's three bros while baring his fangs. Linley could hear Bebe's voice in his head. "Boss, these three punks think you're lying! Boss, use a spell of the seventh rank on'm, show'm!"

Linley glanced at Bebe. "Bebe, enough."

A 'wronged' look on his face, Bebe glanced at Linley then fell silent.

“Bebe’s performing skills are pretty good, actually.” Linley secretly laughed, and then he looked at his three close friends. “Boss Yale. You three don’t believe me. When I go tomorrow to apply for graduation, you’ll see.”

Yale, George, and Reynolds all knew what sort of person Linley was. Linley wasn’t the type of guy to lie.

“Third Bro, you really accomplished it?”

Linley nodded slightly. “How about, I show you the Soaring Technique.” Linley began to mumble the words to a magical incantation, while Yale and the others quietly watched. After a while, wind-type elemental essence began swirling around his body, lifting Linley into the air.

Linley rose very slowly, hovering perhaps only twenty centimeters above the air. Someone looking from far away wouldn’t be able to tell that he was in mid-air at all.

“This is the Floating Technique.” Reynolds said.

The Floating Technique only allowed one to rise up and down.

“Watch closely.” Linley suddenly shot up into the air at an incline. Upon reaching the height of several tens of meters, he suddenly dropped down at high speed again. But once he reached the height of 20 centimeters, he once more came to a halt, maintaining a hovering height.

After maintaining this state for a few moments, Linley landed.

“The Soaring Technique?” Yale and the others were truly astonished.

Although this demonstration of Linley’s was seemingly simple, it also showed one thing very clearly. Being able to rise at an incline was definitely something only the Soaring Technique would allow.

“Hey, Linley! Long time no see! Didn’t imagine that I’d find you here, showing off your jumping skills.” From far away, a young man laughed as he walked over. From far away, Linley’s movement did indeed seem like he was jumping in the air.

To a very powerful warrior, jumping several dozen meters was not too difficult.

And a large majority of the people at the Ernst Institute knew that this genius, Linley, was not only a magus, he was also a mighty warrior. There had been people who had seen him easily carry a thousand-pound boulder inside his dormitory.

Linley, Yale, and others exchanged pleasantries with the fellow, as he was a neighbor living next door to them.

“Third Bro, you’ve really become a magus of the seventh rank. This can’t...can’t be possible? But just now, I...” George was the first one to say excitedly after the neighbor left.

“A seventeen year old magus of the seventh rank. My heavens. Has there ever been such a genius in the entire history of the Yulan continent?” Reynolds was getting excited as well.

Looking at Linley, Yale’s eyes were shining. “Even I am starting to look forward to Third Bro’s graduation ceremony. I want to see the looks on the faces of those test givers...”

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The next morning. On the empty magical ability examination fields of the Ernst Institute, thirty instructors were standing in a line. In truth, four magus instructors were enough for a graduation test, but most instructors at the Ernst Institute had a lot of free time. Upon hearing that Linley was going to apply for graduation, they all came over to watch the fun.

After all, generally speaking, most students would only apply for graduation after being confirmed as a magus of the sixth rank. After spending some time at the sixth rank, only then would they apply for graduation. In a situation like that, there was no need for an actual graduation examination. Thus, a graduation examination was quite a rare event.

Thirty instructors, plus three students – Yale, George, and Reynolds.

Amidst the thirty or so instructors, there was even Vice Chancellor Deland [De’lan’tē], who came here out of interest. As Deland had put it, “If one of the two greatest geniuses of our Institute is applying for graduation, of course I must be here to witness it.”

“Linley, utilize the earth-style spell, ‘Earth Spear Array’. Based on the size and speed of the earthen spears, we will be able to assess your level.” One of the test-givers spoke.

If his spell power had reached the sixth rank, then naturally he would be able to graduate.

Linley slightly shook his head.

All of the onlookers couldn't help but feel suspicious. Vice Chancellor Deland spoke out. "Linley, aren't you applying to graduate? What is going on?"

"I want to use wind-style magic." Linley said with a smile.

Vice Chancellor Deland and the onlookers all laughed. They knew that Linley was a dual-element magus of wind and earth. But the test of magical strength was primarily a test of spiritual energy. It made no difference which element was tested; the underlying spiritual energy wouldn't change.

"Go ahead." Vice Chancellor Deland and the thirty odd instructors all grinned at Linley.

Linley immediately began to mutter the words to the seventh-ranked wind-style spell, 'Soaring Technique'. After a while, a gust of wind began to swirl around Linley's body. Linley's body soared into the air, and then he began to agilely glide about in the air, sometimes turning, sometimes diving, sometimes flying straight at high speeds.

"So...Soaring Technique?!"

The thirty odd magus instructors were all shocked. They all knew what was implied by the usage of the Soaring Technique.

"A seventeen year old, dual-element magus of the seventh rank. This..." Vice Chancellor Deland immediately understood that the quiet Ernst Institute would perhaps no longer be quiet for a long, long time.

Chapter 7

A dual-element magus of the seventh rank, compared to the Yulan continent as a whole, could only be considered someone who had just stepped into the field of the powerful figures.

But if you added the words 'seventeen year old' in front of the words 'dual-element magus of the seventh rank', the effect was totally different. The Radiant Church probably wouldn't care too much about a dual-element magus of the seventh rank; after all, there were plenty of powerful figures in the Yulan continent.

However...

A seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank? Leaving the Radiant Church aside for now, perhaps each and every major power on the Yulan continent would be jealous to possess this.

“Genius. Genius!” Vice Chancellor Deland, a magus of the eighth rank, was extremely excited.

All of the watching magus instructors were in shock as well. All of them understood exactly what a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank represented. This was a miracle! At the very least, it was the Ernst Institute’s miracle!

“Heh heh.” Yale, George, and Reynolds all started to snicker.

They had all been anticipating the expressions on the faces of these magi. And it was as priceless as they had hoped.

In terms of power, Vice Chancellor Deland couldn’t even rank amongst the top three, here at the Ernst Institute, but he had significant amounts of experience. He quickly was able to tamp down his excitement, and was the first to walk to Linley’s side.

“Linley, do you know what being a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank represents?”

“Heh, does he have to ask?” At this time, Doehring Cowart flew out of the ring, delightedly stroking his long, white beard. “How could the pupil of I, Doehring Cowart, not be outstanding?”

All of the teachers currently present were quite far from the Saint-level. Naturally, none of them were able to detect the presence of Doehring Cowart’s spirit.

“Seventeen years...” Deland sighed with praise. “In the entire history of the Ernst Institute, based on age, amongst all of the students to attain the seventh rank, you, Linley, are the youngest. The previous record holder, a genius who attained the seventh rank at age 19, went on to become a Saint-level Grand Magus.”

A silver-haired elder next to him spoke out. “Let’s not discuss the Ernst Institute for now. If we look at the Yulan continent as a whole, and look at the records of the continent as a whole, you are the second-youngest genius in all of recorded history to reach the seventh rank.”

The Yulan continent as a whole had been around for countless years, and also covered a huge amount of territory. There was no way for the Ernst Institute to match it in terms of records.

“The second in history?” Linley was rather surprised as well.

How many countless geniuses had the Yulan continent produced, over these years? For himself to be able to be the second youngest in history was a terrifying accomplishment.

“The youngest magus in the entire history of the Yulan continent to reach the seventh rank was a Saint-level Grand Magus who lived over 8000 years ago. He became a magus of the seventh rank when he was 16 years old. The previous second youngest, who has just become the third youngest, became a magus of the seventh rank when he turned 18. In the end, he topped out at the ninth rank. This was because afterwards, he suffered a huge setback, and his personality changed. We can put it like this...aside from you, of those top ten young geniuses who reached the seventh rank earliest, six of them became Saint-level Grand Magi, while the other four became arch magi of the ninth rank.”

Generally speaking, a magus of the seventh rank was given the title of ‘Senior Magus’.

A magus of the eighth rank would be respectfully titled ‘Master Magus’.

A magus of the ninth rank would be honored with the title of ‘Arch Magus’.

And a Saint-level magus could be venerated as a ‘Grand Magus’.

“Put another way...based on your talent, becoming a magus of the ninth rank is going to be virtually no problem at all. All you need is time. But if you continue to strive hard, you have the great potential to become a Saint-level Grand Magus. After all, you are the second youngest magus of the seventh rank in all of history.” That silver-haired elder looked at Linley solemnly.

Linley had some degree of eagerness towards eventually becoming a Saint-level magus, but that eagerness wasn’t too excessive.

This was because Linley knew very well that it was even harder for a magus to advance in power than it was for a warrior.

True, warriors and magi both needed spiritual energy. But they had different requirements as to how much spiritual energy was needed.

Magi didn’t train their bodies, focusing exclusively on spiritual energy. The vast majority of their time was spent building up their spiritual energy, because spiritual energy impacted their ability to gather mageforce, as well as to direct and control elemental essences. A mighty magus also needed a terrifying amount of spiritual energy.

But warriors were different.

To a warrior, the most important thing was still their body. Spiritual energy and battle-qi were both secondary. Only once they had a powerful body would they be able to contain lots of battle-qi. Spiritual energy was only used to more finely control the usage of that battle-qi.

If you compared a magus of the seventh rank and a warrior of the seventh rank, the difference in spiritual energy could be as much as ten times more for the magus.

“Even if in the future, I reach the level of Saint-level Grand Magus, I surely would have taken a tremendous amount of time. By contrast, based on my inherent talent as a Dragonblood Warrior, I will reach the Saint-level at a much faster pace.” Linley knew very well his clan’s history. Dragonblood Warriors usually only needed a few scant decades to reach the Saint-level of power.

What’s more...

A Dragonblood Warrior who had reached the Saint-level in power was extremely formidable. Even amongst Saint-level combatants, a Dragonblood Warrior would be considered an ultimate-tier combatant.

“Linley, you are the most successful student in the entire history of our Institute. For these next few days, we ask that you please remain here at the Institute. We will invite some of the absolute best painters and sculptors to come and paint paintings and carve sculptures of you, which we will keep in the Institute as mementos.” Vice Chancellor Deland immediately said.

As the second youngest magus to reach the seventh rank in the entire history of the Yulan continent, Linley naturally was the pride of the entire Ernst Institute.

“A painting?” Linley was stunned.

He realized that in front of these painters and sculptors, he would have to stand still for a very long period of time. As he realized this, Linley couldn’t help but think to himself, becoming the second youngest magus to reach the seventh rank in the entire history of the Yulan continent was perhaps not as wonderful as it sounded.

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The number one genius in the history of the Ernst Institute, and the number two genius in the history of the Yulan continent. A seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank. This astonishing news quickly spread across the entire Ernst Institute.

“A seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank? How is that possible?”

“There’s no way this news is fake. So many of the Institute’s teachers were present at that time, and Vice Chancellor Deland has even invited painters to come and paint pictures of Linley, with the intention of forever enshrining his image within our Institute.”

“My heavens, a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank. Based on this speed, he should reach the eighth rank in ten years, and the ninth rank in twenty. He’ll be ninth-ranked Arch Magus in his forties. Most likely, within a century, he will become a Saint-level Grand Magus.”

“I just flipped through some of the books in the library. Aside from Linley, of the top ten geniuses in history, six became Saint-level Grand Magi, while the other four all became Arch Magi of the ninth rank. Linley is way too incredible.”

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The entire Ernst Institute was shaken upside down by this news. If a student was perhaps just slightly better than his peers, perhaps he would be viewed with jealousy. But once a student’s achievements reached a level as high as this, becoming the second youngest magus to reach the seventh rank in the entire history of the Yulan continent, they would only be filled with respect and veneration.

In their eyes, Linley’s future prospects were limitless. There was no way for them to compare with him.

In the past, there were still some people who claimed that Dixie was the number one genius of the Institute. Now, no one said such a thing.

Without question, the number one genius of the Ernst Institute was Linley. And it wasn’t just now; Linley was the number one genius of the Ernst Institute in all of its five-thousand-year-long history. Dixie was currently just a magus of the sixth rank. Who knew how long it would take before he could reach the seventh rank?

“Linley, a magus of the seventh rank?” Having just completed his meditative training, Dixie fell silent upon hearing this news from his sister Delia.

After having ‘surpassed’ Linley when he became a magus of the sixth rank, Dixie had felt some sense of satisfaction. But this new bit of news seemed to push him into a deep abyss. Linley’s speed of improvement was simply too astonishing. Even when he chased after Linley with all his might, it seemed like he was still being thrown farther and farther behind by Linley.

"Big brother." Delia said in a soft voice. She was a bit concerned about her big brother.

Delia knew all too well that ever since he was young, her big brother had been an extremely proud person. He was very cold to others, and also extremely strict with himself. Her big brother never submitted to anyone, but ever since Linley had rocketed up from the fourth rank to the fifth rank, her big brother had felt threatened.

Her big brother had worked extremely hard, and in the previous year had managed to cross the threshold of the sixth rank.

But Linley actually...

"Don't worry. I'm fine." Dixie slowly shook his head. "Delia, I suddenly feel as though there's not that much point in remaining here at the Institute. I also plan to apply for graduation. In the upcoming days, I'll return to the Empire and return to the clan."

Delia was startled.

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Within a private area inside the Huadeli Hotel, there were four bedrooms and two living rooms. It was quite large. Linley and his three bros were currently living here.

Ever since the news that Linley had become a magus of the seventh rank had spread out, dorm 1987 hadn't had a single peaceful day. Huge amounts of people came to pay their respects to Linley, forcing Linley to hide here, within the Huadeli Hotel. Due to the deep background and connections possessed by the Huadeli Hotel, few people dared to trespass here.

"Third Bro, when you are quiet, you are very low-key, but when you finally make your move, by the heavens do you cause a ruckus!" Yale sighed.

Linley chuckled.

Actually, this was a decision which he had arrived at after serious discussions with Doehring Cowart. After all, currently, the Baruch clan was still weak. If they wanted to strengthen it rapidly, the best way to do so was to quickly spread the word that he already possessed the might of a magus of the seventh rank."

A seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank! This would cause every organization in the continent to send people inviting him to join them. Naturally, they would offer exceptional conditions as well.

And thus, Linley would do better and better in the future.

“Third Bro, I’m no longer going to hide this information from you. The Dawson Conglomerate, one of the three great trading unions in the Yulan continent, belongs to my clan. Are you interested in joining the Dawson Conglomerate?” Yale looked at Linley. In all honesty, Yale was very much hoping that Linley would become a member of the Dawson Conglomerate.

The number two genius in the entire history of the Yulan continent. If a genius like this entered the Dawson Conglomerate, his future status would unquestionably be very high. Naturally, this would also be hugely beneficial to Yale’s status within his clan.

“The Dawson Conglomerate?!” Reynolds let out a startled yelp. “Wow, Boss Yale, I always knew you were a member of the Dawson clan, but there are way too many clans with the name ‘Dawson’. But the Dawson clan you belong to is actually the Dawson clan behind the Dawson Conglomerate? The Dawson Conglomerate! My goodness, you are rich!”

George also looked at Yale.

“Boss Yale, this...” Linley hesitated.

“Don’t worry. You are my bro, first and foremost. I won’t force you.” Yale laughed. “I can’t guarantee other things, but what I can guarantee is that if you do decide to join the Dawson Conglomerate, then money will not be an issue. At the very least, we can provide you with a hundred million gold coins.”

“A hundred million gold coins?!” Linley, George, and Reynolds were all flabbergasted.

A hundred million gold coins. What a terrifyingly large sum that was.

Perhaps all of the combined assets of the richest clan in Fenlai City wouldn’t add up to a hundred million gold coins.

“Linley, the clan of this bro of yours is really too wealthy. A hundred million gold coins, damn...” Even Doehring Cowart was stunned.

Even a master sculptor’s most famous, legacy-making sculpture would only be worth a million gold coins at most. This was already a terrifying sum of money, and how many master sculptors were there?

“Third Bro, I can honestly tell you that aside from the other two trading unions, in the entire Yulan continent, not even the Four Great Empires or the two major alliances would be able to produce such a vast amount of money at once. As for those kingdoms...hmph.” Yale was very certain of his words.

The Four Great Empires and the two major alliances both had their own Saint-level combatants. But the Four Great Empires and the two major alliances had to pay the upkeep for their huge armies as well as provide for the entire country. Although they were wealthy, asking them to produce a hundred million gold coins all at once would be very difficult for them. At the very least, it would require lengthy, complicated internal deliberations.

For someone who wasn’t (yet) a Saint-level combatant? They wouldn’t be willing to do it.

Only the three major trading unions, with their terrifying amount of wealth, would. Although they possessed a staggering amount of money, in terms of military power, although they were strong, they were much weaker than the Four Great Empires and the two major alliances. Thus, they all urgently needed experts to join their ranks.

“Knock!” “Knock!” “Knock!”

Suddenly, the sound of their door being knocked on could be heard.

Yale frowned and walked over to the door. Opening it, he said, “I thought I gave instructions for us not to be disturbed?”

The manager of the Huadeli Hotel said awkwardly, “Young master Yale, a Cardinal of the Radiant Church, along with three clerics and a troop of Knights of the Radiant Temple, have arrived outside the hotel.”

Yale started.

One of the Cardinals, whose position and authority in the entire Radiant Church was second only to the Holy Emperor himself? The rank of each and every Cardinal was much higher than that of one of the kings of a kingdom. If a Cardinal had personally come, leading a troop of people, there was no way that he, a young master of the Dawson Conglomerate, could possibly block the way.

“Looks like Third Bro has quite a powerful appeal!”

Chapter 8

Within the formal reception area for the Huadeli Hotel, two seventh-ranked Knights of the Radiant Temple were standing on each side of the main hallway, while Linley and the other three entered the formal reception area from another entrance. Their footsteps on the smooth marble floor, so polished that it could serve as a mirror, produced clear, ringing sounds.

When Linley, Yale, and the others stepped into the reception area, the seven people already inside the reception area turned to look at them.

“A Cardinal, three Vicars, and three Knights of the Radiant Temple.” Linley immediately could tell each person’s status, and could also immediately sense that all seven of these people were extremely powerful. Based on what Linley already knew....

Within the Radiant Church, the position of the Cardinals was second only to the Holy Emperor himself. In order to become a Cardinal, one needed to not only have sufficient fame, but also have the power of an Arch Magus of the ninth rank.

“An Arch Magus of the ninth rank?” Linley couldn’t help but carefully scrutinize this Cardinal in front of him.

This Cardinal appeared to be a middle-aged man, with a head full of curly silver hair. His nose was high and sharp, while a hint of a smile played about his lips. He seemed quite amiable.

“Hello, Linley. And you, young Yale.” The Cardinal smiled as he rose to his feet. “Let me make some brief introductions. These three Vicars are my assistants, while these three Knights of the Radiant Temple belong to the ‘Glory’ division. They are, respectively, Commander Marcus [Ma’ku’si] and his two Deputy Commanders. As for myself...you can just go ahead and call me Guillermo [Ji’er’mo].”

Cardinal Guillermo.

Linley had previously heard that the Holy Union had a total of eight ace regiments of knights. One of them was the ‘Glory’ division. Each of these Eight Ace Regiments was extremely powerful and possessed astounding offensive ability.

“Lord Guillermo, Lord Marcus. All the other lords present. Might I ask why you have come?” Linley said with humility, while at the same time, Linley began to check out Marcus.

Marcus was an extremely powerful-looking bald man. Sitting there, the impression he gave was that of a mountain at rest, immovable by any outside force. In this seven-man delegation from the Radiant Church, Marcus and Guillermo held the highest ranks. Marcus, in his capacity as the Commander of one of the Eight Ace Regiments, most likely was not any weaker than Guillermo, and his personal status was roughly on the same level as well.

Marcus' lips cracked open, and his deep, weighty voice rang out. "I heard Guillermo say that our Holy Union has produced an incredible genius. A seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank. I was very much curious what this genius looked like. Today, now that I've had a chance to see for myself...haha...I like what I see."

Based on Marcus' experience, at a glance, he naturally could tell that Linley was a warrior as well.

"Kid, what rank are you as a warrior?" Marcus asked directly.

Guillermo just sat there 'obediently', seemingly not at all displeased by Marcus' interruption.

Linley modestly said, "This year, I just reached the sixth rank as a warrior."

"Oh." Marcus' eyes lit up. "A seventeen year old warrior of the sixth rank. That's already extremely impressive. I, Marcus, rarely am in awe of anyone, but I must admit that you definitely are a genius. Not only have you become an incredibly talented magus, you are an excellent warrior as well."

Linley smiled very humbly.

The two Knights seated to each side of Marcus also had looks of surprise on their faces.

Guillermo chuckled. "Enough, Marcus. Yes, it is quite impressive that Linley is a warrior of the sixth rank at age seventeen, but let's be honest, we can find one or two of those in virtually every single warrior academy. His true worth still lies in his talent as a magus."

The training difficulty for a warrior was somewhat lower than that of a magus to begin with.

For those who trained hard and worked out since they were young, and (if they came from good families) trained in battle-qi since youth, becoming a warrior of the sixth rank at age seventeen wasn't too difficult.

“Linley, as a member of our Holy Union who possesses such astounding abilities, you make me, a Cardinal of the Radiant Temple, feel extremely proud. I want to ask you, have you given any consideration to joining the Holy Union? I think, based on your natural ability, if you join us, I can guarantee that you will immediately receive the rank of Vicar of the Radiant Temple. In the future, becoming a Cardinal should not be a problem.” Guillermo put his offer directly on the table.

The number two super-genius in all of history. There should be a better than 90% chance that Linley would end up becoming a Saint-level Grand Magus. The 10% chance only existed because it was possible that due to suffering some sort of mental setback, Linley would decide to stop improving.

A potential Saint-level combatant. Even if Linley didn’t train very hard, becoming an Arch Magus of the ninth rank should be guaranteed. A talent like this had to be absorbed.

“Lord Guillermo, to me, this news is a little too sudden.” A modest, shy smile had appeared on Linley’s face. “I’m only seventeen years old this year. I haven’t given a lot of thought to these affairs. A high rank and great power also symbolize heavy responsibilities which I’m currently afraid to take on. Could I...wait a few years?”

Linley was declining.

Guillermo frowned.

The number two genius in the entire history of the Yulan continent, a person who most likely would be a Saint-level combatant in the future. Even if they couldn’t make use of him, they wouldn’t allow enemies to make use of him either.

“Linley, I know that you are young, but you are a member of the Holy Union, and you are a genius. As a genius, you should get used to and accept the fact that your dazzling brilliance will bring you burdens, rather than try and decline them.”

Guillermo reproved him kindly.

“In addition, you can become a Vicar under my direct authority. I can guarantee that you will have the freedom to do whatever you please. As long as you do not act against the interests of the Radiant Temple, I definitely will not interfere with your freedom of action. Is this acceptable to you?”

“In addition, you can also join any single kingdom belonging to the Holy Union, and we can even guarantee that you will receive a Dukedom.” Guillermo, it must be said, was acting in a very sincere manner.

Linley was silent for a while.

Guillermo's three assistant Vicars were beginning to frown, but Guillermo continued to smile, watching Linley with a gaze filled with hope.

This gaze alone made it very hard to refuse him.

Next to Linley, Yale, Reynolds, and George were all silent. At a point in time like this, even Yale didn't dare to make a noise. This was a Cardinal of the Radiant Church!

In the pyramid-like hierarchy of the Holy Union, the Cardinals stood at the very apex. Their power exceeded that of any king, and even Yale's father wasn't comparable to them. How would he, a young master of a trading union, dare to butt in?

Linley was thinking nonstop, while Doehring Cowart had begun advising Linley as soon as they had entered this room.

The Four Great Empires and the two major alliances were constantly struggling for advantage in very fierce, cruel ways. 'If I cannot have it, I cannot allow my enemies to have it either.' This was a fairly common point of view.

"Lord Guillermo." Linley finally spoke.

Guillermo's eyes lit up. Smiling, he said to Linley, "You've decided?"

Linley nodded. "Lord Guillermo, I've grown up in the Kingdom of Fenlai since I was a child, so naturally, I am a member of the Holy Union. I can guarantee that as long as the Holy Union doesn't turn its back on me, I definitely will not betray the Holy Union either. I definitely will not join any foreign power, no matter who they are."

"What do you mean to say?" Guillermo looked questioningly at Linley.

Linley continued, "What I mean to say is, right now, I don't want to make a decision in a hurry. Please allow me to discuss this matter with my father, and then I'll tell you my choice. What I can guarantee is...I definitely will not join with the Four Great Empires, or the Dark Alliance."

Smiling, Guillermo nodded slightly. "Right. Such an important decision must be discussed with your father. I'll wait for your reply."

As he spoke, Guillermo rose to his feet. The three Vicars by his side, as well as Marcus and his two Deputy Commanders, also stood up. "Since we've come to an agreement, then I won't disturb you any further. The Radiant Temple's sincerity is true and genuine, and so is our patience. I only hope that you, Linley, won't end up

making me wait ten or twenty years for your decision. Haha..." As he spoke, Guillermo began to laugh.

Linley and the other three stood up as well, watching Guillermo and the others leave.

Only after the delegation from the Radiant Temple had departed did Linley and his bros finally calm down.

"Whew. I was scared to death just now. I didn't even dare to breathe out loud." Reynolds let out a long sigh.

George nodded as well. "Although that Cardinal behaved in a very friendly fashion towards us, I still felt that my heart couldn't settle down."

Yale began to laugh. "Naturally. After all, he is a Cardinal, one of the most powerful people in the entire Holy Union. Hey, Third Bro, what are you thinking? The Radiant Church isn't easy to fend off. After all, we are in the territory of the Holy Union and are under their control."

"No rush, no rush." Linley laughed. "When you see the power of others, you also need to see your own strengths. Although I can't compare to them, as long as I don't throw in with those five other groups, the Radiant Church won't move against me. After all, I did say I was going to discuss it with my father. As long as I don't go meet with my father right away, then I can drag this out a while longer, right?"

As he spoke, he looked at Yale. "Yale, I want to ask a favor of you."

"Speak." Yale looked at Linley.

Linley said in a low voice, "This is somewhat humiliating to say. One of the ancestral heirlooms of the Baruch clan, the weapon of our very first clan leader, the warblade 'Slaughterer', should be in the hands of one of the larger noble clans of the Kingdom of Fenlai. I hope that you can help me investigate who is currently in possession of the warblade 'Slaughterer'."

"An ancestral heirloom? This absolutely must be found. Third Bro, do you want me to directly acquire it for you?" Yale immediately said.

Linley laughed. "Boss Yale, if you can help me locate it, that would be more than enough. What's more, right now, money is not a problem for me." By nature, Linley hated owing others.

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Two days later. Early morning.

Part of Linley's room was covered with a layer of earth-colored light. This earth-colored light did not cover a very large area, only perhaps a circle with circumference of two or three meters. Anyone who stepped into that area would sense a tremendous gravitational force.

Earth-style magic – Supergravity Field!

Having reached the seventh rank as a magus, the power of Linley's Supergravity Field was now much stronger than before. The strength of the local gravity field within the circle was four times normal gravity. Under four times the normal gravity, even the blood vessels in one's body would suffer severe damage, to say nothing of the rest of the body.

Linley wasn't using any earth magic to counteract the force of this gravity field. Instead, he was using his body's physical strength alone to resist that terrifying gravity. Right now, his entire body was upside down, and he was holding himself up with his fingers alone, constantly exercising his finger strength and wrist strength.

"...725. 726."

"Drip. Drip." Beads of sweat were constantly rolling down from Linley's temples, falling onto the ground.

The door to the room suddenly banged open, and Yale excitedly charged into the room. "Hey, Third Bro, I have news regarding the search for the 'Slaughterer' that you entrusted me with." As he spoke, Yale accidentally entered the area of the Supergravity Field.

"Yale!" Slapping the floor with his palms, Linley immediately flipped himself upright and immediately pulled Yale out of the Supergravity Field.

"Huff...puff..." Yale was breathing heavily. Staring at Linley in surprise, he said, "Third Bro, you created a Supergravity Field within your bedroom? I got caught by it. That feeling just now was absolutely terrible. It felt like my heart was about to stop."

Fortunately, the time he had spent within the field was miniscule, as otherwise, Yale's body would indeed have suffered negative consequences.

"Right, Boss Yale, didn't you just say something about the 'Slaughterer'?" Linley's attention was totally fixated on that mention of his ancestral heirloom. For his

father's entire life, his father's greatest desire was the recovery of this ancestral heirloom which had been passed down from five thousand years ago.

Yale nodded slightly. "Oh. I just received word that your clan's warblade, 'Slaughterer', is in the hands of a large clan within Fenlai City itself. That clan is called....uh..." Yale couldn't help but frown, as he momentarily couldn't recall the name of the clan.

"Hey, Third Bro, Boss Yale, that Director Maia came in person again." Reynolds voice called out from beyond the doorway.

Chapter 9

Within the living room.

"My deepest apologies, Director Maia," Linley said humbly, "But for now, I really do not wish to put this sculpture on auction, nor do I wish to display it. But I can guarantee that if in the future I do desire to auction it off, or to put it on exhibit, I will beseech the Proulx Gallery to assist me."

Leaning on his cane, Director Maia smiled at Linley. "Oh, that's fine. This time, asking you to consider displaying your sculpture in our gallery was only a secondary purpose. My primary purpose was to come see this sculpting genius, the likes of whom we might see once in a trillion years."

Just at this time, the manager of the hotel came over.

This manager humbly smiled towards Director Maia, then turned to Linley and Yale. "Young master Yale, young master Linley, representatives from the Rhine Empire are outside the hotel. They wish to meet with young master Linley."

"Haha." Laughing, Director Maia stood up. "Linley, seems like you're quite busy nowadays. Then I won't disturb you for now. I'll take my leave."

As he spoke, Director Maia led his attendants out of the hotel.

Linley looked at the hotel manager. "Please help me block them. Right now, I do not wish to meet with representatives of the Four Great Empires or the Dark Alliance." Linley very bluntly refused to meet with any of the people who had come to see him. Linley knew very well that if he were to meet with representatives of the Four Great Empires or the Dark Alliance, that would cause great dissatisfaction with the Radiant Church.

After all, as soon as he met with them, even if he refused their offer in the end, the Radiant Church would still be suspicious of him, as they would have had no one present during the meeting.

And the Radiant Church had tremendous power throughout the Yulan continent. It was no weaker than any of the Four Great Empires. There was no need for Linley to join with the Four Great Empires or the Dark Alliance.

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Three days later. Within a carriage headed towards Fenlai City were Linley and Yale, while Reynolds and George remained at the Institute.

“Third Bro. You are wise indeed. These past two or three days, representatives from the Dark Alliance and the Four Great Empires constantly tried to meet with you.” Yale laughed. The people who had come to meet with Linley were all people with some authority and influence within their respective organizations, albeit they were based in the Holy Union.

None of those people, however, were major figures. After all, the news of a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank would take a fairly long period of time before making its way to the Four Great Empires and the Dark Alliance. This was because the distance was simply too far.

All of those people who attempted to meet with Linley had made the decision to contact him on their own authority.

Unfortunately, all of them were stopped at the door by Linley’s directive.

“Yale, that family which collected the ancestral heirloom of my clan, that “Lucas” [Lu’ka’si] clan...if I try to get back the ‘Slaughterer’ from them, is it really going to be that difficult?” Linley was heading off to Fenlai City for the express purpose of taking care of this affair.

Yale nodded. “Right. At first, I so eager to share the news that I didn’t look any deeper into this clan. But now, it appears this Lucas clan is quite extraordinary.”

Linley nodded slightly.

A clan which had purchased his own clan’s ancestral heirloom hundreds of years ago clearly was not a recent established, minor clan.

“The Lucas clan is also a fairly ancient clan, with about a thousand years of history. In the entire Kingdom of Fenlai, their wealth can only be considered middling, but in

terms of influence amongst the nobility, they are quite powerful. Most importantly of all...the clan leader of the Lucas clan is an extremely obstinate old man, and a serious hoarder. That ancestral heirloom of your clan was the personal weapon of the very first Dragonblood Warrior. Although it's been over a thousand years since a Dragonblood Warrior has appeared, this weapon is still something quite special. And what's more, that weapon of your clan is worth at least a few hundred thousand gold coins."

"But even if you had the money, based on the obstinate nature of the clan leader of the Lucas clan, you most likely will still find it hard to acquire it."

Yale sighed as he spoke.

Some people couldn't be moved by money alone.

"Linley, if my Second Uncle lends a hand and utilizes the connections that our Dawson Conglomerate has, giving that old geezer some pressure, then the level of difficulty would drop significantly." Yale suggested.

Linley knew that Yale spoke out of good intentions, but Linley truly did not wish for anyone else to assist in this matter.

"Let me try first. If I absolutely cannot convince him, then I'll ask you, Boss Yale, to help out." Linley laughed.

Suddenly, Linley felt a shudder next to him. And then, Bebe's tiny form popped out from the side, staring sleepily at Linley and Yale. At the same time, Bebe mentally said to Linley, "Boss, this carriage is so slow. I've slept for a good while now, but we still aren't at Fenlai City yet."

Hugging Bebe, Linley said, "Alright, that's enough. After a while, we'll be there."

Suddenly....

"Aaaah!" A miserable scream. The carriage came to a sudden halt.

Seated with the carriage, Linley and Yale both felt the carriage suddenly shake. The look on Yale's face changed. "Not good."

"We would like to invite young masters Linley and Yale to step out." A rather piercing voice emanated from outside.

Linley and Yale exchanged glances. For their opponent to be able to surround and stop them without them even knowing demonstrated that the opponent clearly was more powerful than them. Without any resistance, they stepped out of the carriage.

Right now, their two bodyguards of the seventh rank had both collapsed onto the ground, staining it with their blood. Even the carriage driver had collapsed. For a warrior of the seventh rank to be killed without even being able to react was a clear indication of their opponent's strength.

"Young masters Linley and Yale, we come without any ill intentions. We just want to invite Linley to come be our guest for a little while. As far as you, young master Yale, naturally we won't harm you." Not far away, three men were standing in greenish-black clothes. Their leader, a man covered in knife scars, was the one who had spoken.

Yale was furious at the deaths of his bodyguards of the seventh rank, but he didn't give vent to his rage. After all, he could tell how much stronger these opponents were.

The scarred man smiled towards Linley. "Linley, don't resist. My subordinates can easily capture you, let alone myself. Right now, the only thing you have to do is to obediently follow us. Are you willing? Or must we use force."

Linley glanced alongside at Yale. Linley really did not want to cause Yale any misfortune.

"Third Bro, don't go with them." Yale said frantically.

In his heart, Linley knew very well that these three combatants were either from the Dark Alliance or the Four Great Empires. Based on their strength, even if he and Bebe went all out to resist them, it most likely wouldn't be enough. What's more, the purpose of these people in seeking him out was to have him join them, so they probably wouldn't go so far as to harm him.

"Alright, I'll follow." Linley nodded.

The knife-scarred man couldn't help but grin. "That's great to hear. Young master Yale, we hope you'll forget all about what just happened here." As he spoke, the knife-scarred man glanced at the two next to him. Those two instantly scurried at high speed next to Linley.

"Let's go." The knife-scarred man instructed.

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Holding onto Bebe, Linley began heading southeast under the escort of those two men by his side.

“Boss, let’s kill these two guys. I’m confident in my ability to kill the two surrounding you. But as to that knife-scarred guy, I’m not so sure.” Bebe said mentally.

Linley knew that Bebe’s senses were usually extremely accurate.

He, too, was able to extrapolate that these two people by his side were most likely warriors of the eighth rank. And that knife-scarred leader of theirs was most likely a warrior of the ninth rank. An organization capable of sending out a warrior of the ninth rank and two warriors of the eighth rank was no ordinary organization.

“Bebe, don’t be rash.” Linley held him back.

“Where on earth did all these experts start popping out from?” Linley felt helpless.

Doehring Cowart appeared by his side, grinning as he glanced at Linley. “Right now, your status is different from the past. Naturally, the experts you encounter will now also be at a higher level. I told you long ago that only upon attaining the seventh rank will you be considered to have entered the countless ranks of the strong. In each and every one of the Four Great Empires, there might only be a few Saint-level combatants, but there will be at least a few dozen combatants of the ninth rank. Mobilizing one of them for the purpose of dealing with you is no big deal.”

An Empire or one of the major alliances would have hundreds of millions of citizens.

For there to be a few dozen combatants of the ninth rank amongst hundreds of millions of people meant that for every ten million or so, there was one combatant of the ninth rank. In honesty, combatants of the ninth rank were still quite rare.

“Where are they heading to?” Linley stared questioningly at Doehring Cowart.

“If my guess is correct, these three should belong to the Dark Alliance. Most likely, they are trying to first enter the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, and then change directions from within to go directly south, hurrying towards the border with the Dark Alliance.” Doehring Cowart said quite confidently.

Linley thought for a while, then agreed.

The Four Great Empires and the Dark Alliance both had stationed some military units in each other’s territory, but none in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. After all, to most magical beasts, the ordinary soldiers were nothing more than food.

To an ordinary warrior, the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts was extremely vicious.

But to a warrior of the ninth rank and two warriors of the eighth rank? It was a very easy path to traverse. As long as the three of them didn't enter the central areas of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, there shouldn't be any danger.

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Where the battle had occurred just now, Yale remained, staring at the corpses of the three men. Letting out a long sigh, he began to head towards Fenlai City. But just as he left, a man dressed in black suddenly appeared. The man in black glanced in the direction where Linley had been taken, then immediately withdrew a vertical black flute from his clothes.

"Swiiiiish." A strange, piercing sound emanated from the flute.

This sound was extremely strange. If four people in four different locations were to hear it, the one standing in the direction of Fenlai City would hear it a thousand times more loudly than the one standing on the opposite side, away from Fenlai City.

This flute seemed to concentrate all sound in one direction, and it in fact didn't seem to rely on sound; rather, it relied on a unique vibratory mechanism.

....

Holding Bebe, Linley very obediently followed those three men. The knife-scarred man was very satisfied with Linley's cooperativeness.

But once they reached a location approximately three kilometers away from the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, the expression of the knife-scarred man changed.

"Huh." The knife-scarred man instantly retreated to Linley's side, and then icily stared at his surroundings. "Come out."

Instantly, six men in tight black clothes. The knife-scarred man didn't seem to care too much about these six men, as his gaze was fixed upon the distance, where an old man dressed in black and an old man dressed in burlap slowly were making their way over.

"Linley is a member of our Holy Union. You, a Judicator of the Dark Alliance, dare to seize a member of the Holy Union? Aren't you disrespecting the Radiant Church just a little too much?" That old man dressed in black said icily.

The knife-scarred man chuckled. "I didn't expect to draw your personal attention, Deputy Arbiter. Oh, and you've even invited an Ascetic to come as well. And several judicial Executors. Looks like you fellows really value this Linley very highly."

The knife-scarred man was very clear as to the power of his opponent's, but he didn't seem frightened at all.

"All I wanted to do was invite Linley to come have some fun with us in the Dark Alliance, but since all of you have come to prevent that, then forget it." The knife-scarred man looked at the black-robed elder. "Deputy Arbiter, I want you to agree to something. I'll spare Linley, and you spare my two subordinates. What do you say?"

The black-robed man knew very well that the knife-scarred man in front of him was a Judicator of the Dark Alliance, someone with tremendous power which would be extremely hard to kill by himself. But this time, he had also invited an Ascetic of the Radiant Temple to come along with him. To kill this opponent wouldn't be too hard.

But...Linley was in the opponent's hands.

"Fine. I guarantee by my own personal honor that you and your subordinates will be permitted to leave. But Linley must stay behind." The black-robed old man didn't really want to get into a major fight with these opponents right now either.

"Fine. We'll go."

The knife-scarred man immediately turned to leave, while at the same time saying warmly to Linley, "Linley, if you have some free time and the opportunity, you can come visit us at the Dark Alliance whenever you wish. Haha...our Dark Alliance will always welcome you."

After finishing these words, the knife-scarred man and his subordinates suddenly moved at high speed, transforming into three human-shaped blurs as they vanished.

Chapter 10

Linley turned to look at his group of saviors. That leader, the black-robed elder, and the 'Ascetic' by his side were both exceedingly strong. Otherwise, that Judicator of the Dark Alliance wouldn't have fled without even fighting.

The black-robed elder seemed to emanate a chilling aura.

“Deputy Arbiter? After all these years, it seems like the Radiant Church hasn’t changed its internal structure. This Deputy Arbiter should belong to the ‘Ecclesiastical Tribunal’.” Doehring Cowart’s voice rang out in Linley’s mind. “Comparatively speaking, that ‘Ascetic’ fellow is more formidable.”

Ascetic?

Linley couldn’t help but turn his gaze towards the ‘Ascetic’.

Wearing clothes made from rough hemp, that barefooted, long-haired old man emanated a simple, ancient aura. When this ‘Ascetic’ looked at Linley, Linley seemed to sense the warmth of the spring breeze.

“Truly powerful.” Linley thought to himself.

Looking at Linley, a rare smile appeared on the face of the black-robed elder. “Linley, why don’t you come back with us to the Holy Capital. When you reach the Holy Capital, those organizations will not dare to bother you.”

Fenlai City, the Holy Capital of the Holy Union. The Radiant Church was based in Fenlai City. Both in the open as well as in the shadows, it possessed tremendous latent power. Neither the Dark Alliance nor the Four Great Empires would dare to cause trouble in the Holy Capital.

....

East Fenlai City. Within a manor on Greenleaf Road, Linley and Yale were seated in the living room discussing the issue of the warblade ‘Slaughterer’.

“Third Bro, I’ve already sent some people to make inquiries. That clan leader of the Lucas clan is totally unwilling to sell the ‘Slaughterer’. Per his words, his clan doesn’t lack for money.” Yale frowned. “I think it might be better if you personally went and paid a visit. But of course, first he would have to be made aware of your status.”

The second greatest genius magus in the history of the Yulan continent, someone who had a high chance of becoming a future Saint-level Grand Magus, was someone whom perhaps even the clan leader of the Lucas clan, no matter how obdurate, would have to give some face to.

“Then tonight, I’ll pay a visit to this leader of the Lucas clan.” Linley viewed the warblade ‘Slaughterer’ as something which absolutely had to be claimed.

How could the ancestral treasure of the clan continue to remain outside the clan? What's more, recovering it was the long-standing desire of both his father and his ancestors.

The words which his father had said to him when Linley had first left his home and headed to the Ernst Institute still rang out in Linley's mind.

"Linley. Remember the centuries-long desire of generations of the Baruch clan. Remember the shame of the Baruch clan!"

"After you graduate, you will at least be a magus of the sixth rank. As long as you work hard, becoming a magus of the seventh rank won't be too hard. What's more, you are a dual-element magus! A dual-element magus of the seventh rank is definitely going to be a major figure in the Kingdom of Fenlai. In the future, you will definitely have the potential of recovering our ancestral heirloom. If you do not recover it, even in death, I will not forgive you."

.....

"Even in death, I will not forgive you." His father's words hammered at Linley's consciousness.

Linley did not dare to forget these words. As long as he had the ability to do so, he would recover the warblade 'Slaughterer', no matter the cost. This wasn't just for the sake of the clan. It was also for his father's sake.

"No matter what, I have to reclaim it." Linley's mind was set.

If soft persuasion didn't work, he would take harder measures.

But of course, it would be better if he could reclaim his ancestral heirloom openly and above-the-board. He would do his best to have the current owners hand it back.

"Boss. How about you just have me act instead and just take it back." Bebe suddenly piped up in Linley's mind.

Linley glanced at Bebe, napping on Linley's legs. He couldn't help but pat Bebe's little noggin. "Don't make trouble." Bebe couldn't help but wrinkle his nose. With a hmph, he laid back down on Linley's leg and went back to sleep.

At this moment, footsteps could be heard from outside. A blue-robed middle-aged man entered and bowed. "Young master Yale, a Minister of Fenlai Kingdom, Lord Calvin [Ka'li'wen], is outside. He wishes to meet with young master Linley."

"Calvin? Who's that?" Yale frowned.

Yale generally didn't bother with meeting an ordinary kingdom's Minister.

"Young master Yale, recently, haven't you been focused on the Lucas clan? This Calvin is a member of the Lucas clan as well." The blue-robed man chuckled. "The current leader of the Lucas clan is, in fact, his uncle."

Yale's eyes lit up. "Quick, let him in."

"Third Bro, it seems as though your chances of recovering your clan's ancestral heirloom just went up." Yale chuckled at Linley.

In his heart, Linley was feeling rather pleased as well.

Linley was looking towards the door as well. A short moment later, a golden-haired man stepped inside the room, smiling. Upon seeing Linley and Yale, he immediately bowed courteously. "Calvin pays his respects to young masters Linley and Yale."

"Calvin, why have you come to meet with my bro?" Yale asked bluntly.

Calvin didn't mind in the slightest. Smiling, he said, "The purpose of my visit was to serve as the representative of his Majesty. Young master Linley, have you given any consideration to serving as a court magus for the Kingdom of Fenlai? His Majesty would be also willing to enfeoff you with the title of Marquis and the territory to match."

Linley laughed.

He still remembered the conditions offered by that Cardinal of the Radiant Church; he could choose to serve in any kingdom of the Holy Union, and even receive a Dukedom. He didn't have to have any responsibilities, just to enjoy life.

"Calvin, I must say, when I was at the Ernst Institute, a Cardinal of the Radiant Church personally came to invite my bro to join the Radiant Church, and the conditions he offered were much higher as well!" Yale smirked.

Calvin chuckled and continued, "Conditions can always be negotiated. His Majesty only hopes that Linley can remain within our Kingdom of Fenlai."

After all, each of the six kingdoms in the Holy Union had different amounts of power. If the Kingdom of Fenlai acquired Linley's support, then in the future, Fenlai's status within the Holy Union would be further solidified.

After all...

The Radiant Church had the authority to depose any king within the Holy Union, or even exterminate an entire royal clan! The power of the Church far exceeded the power of the royals.

Thus, it was extremely important for a royal clan to have a powerful base of support.

“Calvin.”

Linley finally spoke.

Calvin immediately bowed slightly, appearing to listen very carefully.

“You belong to the Lucas clan, correct?” Linley immediately went to the principal topic for him.

Calvin nodded. A trace of pride on his face, he said, “Correct. The clan leader is my uncle.”

“I belong to the Baruch clan.” Linley looked at Calvin. “An ancestral heirloom of my Baruch clan, known as the warblade, ‘Slaughterer’, has been lost to my clan for centuries now. Right now, I hope to recover this warblade, ‘Slaughterer’. Based on what I know, my clan’s ancestral heirloom is currently residing with your Lucas clan.”

After saying these words, Linley no longer spoke.

Calvin couldn’t help but frown.

“The warblade ‘Slaughterer’, the weapon of the original Dragonblood Warrior?” Calvin looked at Linley.

Calvin was silent for a while, then said, “Young master Linley, honestly speaking, the person with the most authority in the clan is my uncle, but my uncle is getting on in his years. He isn’t responsible for most of the clan’s affairs. His biggest hobby is being a collector. This warblade, ‘Slaughterer’, is an item which he often shows off to visitors. This treasure which is worth nearly a million gold coins is the most valuable item in our clan’s collection as well. It would be fair to say my uncle values this item as much as his life. To have him give it up...this will be difficult.”

Linley frowned.

The warblade ‘Slaughterer’ had originally been sold for only 180,000 gold coins. Although due to inflation, the value of gold centuries ago was much more than it

was now, at most the selling price would be equivalent to nearly 400,000 today. But Calvin had just claimed the value was nearly a million gold coins.

From the looks of it...

That 'disgrace to the family' who sold the warblade, had sold it far too cheaply.

"Calvin. This warblade, 'Slaughterer', is after all the ancestral heirloom of my clan, passed down over five thousand years. You can imagine the importance my clan places upon it. To outsiders, it might merely be a collectible item, but to my clan, the loss of this heirloom is a humiliation." Linley's face was dark and forbidding as he spoke.

"I absolutely must wipe this stain off of our clan's honor. In order to recover this warblade, 'Slaughterer', I am willing to pay any price. Do you understand what I am saying?" Linley stared at Calvin.

Calvin sensed that things were heading in a very wrong direction.

He, too, had heard of the history of the Baruch clan. After all, his clan had several items related to the Baruch clan.

To a clan which had once dominated the entire Yulan continent, the importance of their ancestral heirloom could be imagined. In the past, the Baruch clan was too weak and could be ignored with impunity. But now, this Linley had appeared out of nowhere...forget about the future Linley, even the present Linley would not find it too difficult to deal with their clan.

If Linley said just a few words to the Radiant Church, suggesting that he wanted to recover the 'Slaughterer' to cleanse this humiliating stain on his clan, most likely the Lucas family would have to obediently hand it over.

But once the Radiant Church got involved in this matter, things would get more complicated for everyone involved.

"I understand your meaning, young master Linley." Calvin was growing a bit nervous.

Smiling, Linley looked at Calvin. "I hope the Lucas clan can understand the difficult position I am in. As a descendant of the clan, I have no choice here. Calvin, why don't you go back and have a chat with your uncle first. Tonight, I will personally pay a visit to your clan."

“Our Lucas clan will gladly welcome young master Linley’s arrival.” Calvin was already beginning to mentally map out the way by which he would persuade this obstinate uncle of his.

Watching Calvin depart, Linley felt a slight sense of superiority.

Although he hadn’t taken up any official position, just based on his fame, with a few words, he was able to unsettle a kingdom’s Minister’s mind. This was all due to his status, and his status came from his personal power.

....

That very night.

The welcoming room of the Lucas clan was extremely tastefully adorned, and the ten people within it were, without a doubt, ten extremely important people within the Kingdom of Fenlai. The lowest ranked amongst them was a Count. And the reason all of them were here, was to meet with Linley.

Linley, the newest star of the Kingdom of Fenlai.

Although Linley was only seventeen, and although Linley had not received a writ of nobility, not even the Dukes of the kingdom dared to treat him lightly.

After all, no matter how high their stations were, they were only capable of displaying their power within the Kingdom of Fenlai. But Linley? This was a person who was highly valued by the Four Great Empires and the two major alliances. Perhaps a few decades from now, Linley would become a Cardinal of the Radiant Church, with a status higher than even their king.

It was best for them to build good relations with Linley while he was still of comparatively low rank. And building good relations with Linley was naturally an important matter.

Amonst those ten or so people, only the clan leader of the Lucas clan, Marquis Jebs, [Je’bu], felt rather uncomfortable. He was already getting on in years, and didn’t have any other hobbies. The thing which he loved the most was that weapon of the first Dragonblood Warrior. It was his pride and joy.

But...the descendants of this weapon’s clan had come to retrieve their treasure.

“Mr. Linley, please enter.”

“Mr. Yale, please enter.”

The voices of the attendants outside could be heard. Instantly, all of the ten or so people in the room turned to smile at the door. Even the unhappy Marquis Jebs squeezed a smile onto his face.

This was the first time Linley had been addressed as 'Mr.', a title he was a bit unused to. He saw an old man with gleaming silver hair walk over to him, beaming as he said very courteously, "Very happy to welcome Linley and Yale to my clan's home. As the leader of this clan, I, Jebs, feel deeply honored."

Linley couldn't help but show a hint of a smile on his face.

Looked like there was a chance!

Chapter 11

Within the audience hall of the Lucas clan, the room was dazzlingly lit, and beautiful serving girls brought out tray after tray of delicacies. Everybody was toasting each other and chatting quite amicably.

Since he was young, Linley had received strict instruction from his father, and so he knew how to comport himself. On the surface, he was engaged in idle conversation with the nobles, but in his heart, he was still rather impatient with it all.

"Duke Bonalt [Ba'na], by your leave."

Linley bid a farewell to this Duke Bonalt in front of him, then headed directly to the Lucas clan's leader, Marquis Jebs. Seeing Linley walk in his direction, he knew that he could no longer avoid the topic of the warblade, 'Slaughterer'.

Linley and Marquis Jebs both took seats at a table in the corner of the audience hall.

"Marquis Jebs, I expect your nephew has already informed you as to why I came here today." Linley said courteously.

Marquis Jebs sighed. "Linley, I'm already an old geezer. I really can't bear to part with my collector's items."

"Marquis Jebs, my Baruch clan has over five thousand years of history, and I have always been proud of the fact that I am a descendant of the Baruchs. But for the ancestral heirloom of our clan, the warblade 'Slaughterer', to be lost to us, is a humiliation. Marquis Jebs, I can openly assure you that for centuries now, our clan has labored to recover the warblade 'Slaughterer'. One of the main reasons why I

trained so hard since my youth was out of my desire to recover our ancestral heirloom."

Although Linley's voice was very calm, the 'absolute resolve' in his voice was unmistakable.

"I understand, I understand." Marquis Jebbs, with a major effort, produced a smile.

Of course the Baruch clan would want their ancestral heirloom back. Marquis Jebbs also understood that if he was dead-set on refusing to return the warblade 'Slaughterer', then his Lucas clan would truly draw the ire of this seventeen year old young man.

Marquis Jebbs was fully aware of how much influence this young man now possessed.

Even putting aside the Radiant Church for now, the Dawson Conglomerate alone could easily devastate his family.

"Linley. The warblade 'Slaughterer' is an extremely valuable treasure. In the past, someone offered me a million gold coins to buy it from me, but I couldn't bear to part from it." Marquis Jebbs turned to the subject of 'money'. "Our Lucas clan is an ancient one, but to be frank, we actually don't have a huge amount of money."

Linley understood this point quite well. Based on what Yale said, the Lucas family was a very old one, with a great deal of influence within Fenlai City. But in terms of financial resources, they were far and away less wealthy than, say, the level of Kalan's Debs clan.

To force a not-so-wealthy clan to suddenly hand over a treasure worth a million gold coins as a gift wasn't too realistic.

"So he wants money for it?" Linley relaxed.

If it was just a matter of money, things wouldn't be too difficult.

"Marquis Jebbs. In the past, your clan spent good, solid gold in order to acquire this warblade, 'Slaughterer'. Naturally, I too must give you a figure that would satisfy you. But of course, I do hope that Marquis Jebbs won't try to take a huge lion's bite out of me." Linley chortled as he spoke.

A hint of a smile was revealed on the face of Marquis Jebbs.

No matter what, eventually he would have to hand over the warblade 'Slaughterer'. At the very least, though, he had to get some gold for it.

“Linley, since you have acted so sincerely towards my Lucas clan, then my Lucas clan also has to give you face. Although this warblade ‘Slaughterer’ is worth around a million gold coins, as long as you can offer us six hundred thousand gold coins, then you can take the ‘Slaughterer’ away with you.” Marquis Jebbs said forthrightly.

Six hundred thousand gold coins?

Compared with the actual value of the warblade, ‘Slaughterer’, this really was not a high price.

But right now, Linley had only managed to procure around 200,000 gold coins from his work as a sculptor. This trip to the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, he did indeed obtain a large amount of magicite cores. But the value of these cores was only around a 100,000 gold coins or so. He didn’t have enough money.

The most valuable thing Linley possessed was...

Blueheart Grass and the magicite core of the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear!

Linley had over a hundred clumps of Blueheart Grass left, and each clump was worth several tens of thousands of gold coins. But of course, the price of the Saint-level magicite core was incomparably more valuable. A Saint-level magicite core was an invaluable, priceless treasure, worth far more than the magicite core of a magical beast of the ninth rank.

In the past, according to what the books Linley had read said, the standard valuation of a magical beast of the ninth rank’s magicite core was around five million gold coins. In reality, these days the price would nearly reach ten million gold coins!

But as far as a Saint-level magicite core went, perhaps even if one tried to offer a hundred million gold coins, it still wouldn’t be enough.

A priceless treasure!

Naturally, Linley was not willing to simply sell off the Saint-level magicite core. At the same time, the Blueheart Grass was going to be very important to the future of his clan. Every single clump was to be cherished.

The sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’!

Linley’s mind suddenly drifted to the stone sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’. Linley felt very torn about it, and in fact usually didn’t even want to look at it. This was why Linley continued to let Yale safeguard it.

"Sell it." Linley suddenly came to this decision, and in fact, in the bottom of Linley's heart, this thought flashed by: "I wonder what Alice would think, once she sees this sculpture?"

Linley consulted with Doehring Cowart.

"Linley, it's best if you go ahead and sell off this sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'," Doehring Cowart advised. "You don't want to look at this sculpture, but if you keep it with you, you'll always have it on the back of your mind. Best to just sell it off. Also...this will serve to broaden the fame of the Straight Chisel School that I founded."

Linley chuckled.

"Marquis Jebbs, rest your mind. Very shortly, the 600,000 gold coins will arrive. I only hope that while you are waiting for me, you won't sell off this warblade, 'Slaughterer', to anyone else." Linley said with sincerity.

Marquis Jebbs hurriedly replied, "Linley, be at ease. Even if someone else offered me two million gold coins, I still wouldn't sell it."

Indeed, if it weren't for Linley's particular status, how could Marquis Jebbs bear to part with it?

.....

Within the office of Manager Austoni at the Proulx Gallery.

"What?! You are willing to auction off that sculpture?" Austoni's eyes were wide with amazement and wild joy.

Linley nodded slightly. By his side, Yale cast a helpless look at Linley.

Yale had grown up alongside Linley, and so he understood Linley's temperament very well. Linley was a person who cared deeply about friends, and was extremely loyal to them. But at the same time, Linley hated owing others. This time, Yale was preparing to loan Linley a few hundred thousand gold coins.

But as Linley put it, "I don't want to see this sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', anymore. Best that I sell it."

Yale secretly thought to himself that if this sculpture was auctioned off, Linley's fame would be broadcast far and wide, which would also improve Linley's status. This was a good thing. Thus, Yale didn't try to force Linley to accept his money.

“Wonderful. Wonderful.” Austoni was extremely excited. “Linley, don’t worry one bit. For this sculpture of yours, our gallery won’t collect so much as a single gold coin in transaction fees.”

“I need to auction this sculpture off within the next seven days.” Linley directly stated his requirements.

Austoni said confidently, “Be at ease. Starting tomorrow, our Proulx Gallery will arrange for a five-day major exhibition event, as well as spread the news of this sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, to every single wealthy clan. On the seventh day, we will begin the auction.”

Linley nodded.

“Boss Yale, let’s go.” After formally handing the sculpture over to the Proulx Gallery, Linley could feel something missing in his heart, but at the same time, Linley also felt as though his mind was a bit more relaxed now.

....

Within the main hall of the Proulx Gallery.

Count Juneau still visited the Proulx Gallery virtually every morning. First, he would admire the sculptures in the main hall, before progressing to the hall of the experts and the hall of the masters. But this morning, once Count Juneau stepped into the main hall, he discovered....

“Hey, why are there so many people congregating over there at the hall of the masters?” Count Juneau felt a bit puzzled.

The hall of the masters always had just those few sculptures that everyone had seen before. After being on display for so long, the number of viewers had become rather low. Unless, of course, a new work had been produced by a master sculptor. Only then would the hall of the masters be a bit more lively.

“Can it be that a new work has been produced by a master?” Excited, Count Juneau also headed directly to the hall of the masters.

Currently, it was eight in the morning. Logically speaking, there shouldn’t be many people at the Proulx Gallery. But there were already several dozen people squeezed into the hall of the masters. What’s more, all of these people were staring in astonishment at a sculpture placed dead center in the hall of the masters.

What’s more, this exhibit had eighteen powerfully built guards standing around it.

“So popular? I wonder which master has produced a new work?” Count Juneau forced his way to the front to take a closer look.

Count Juneau’s eyes immediately widened, and his gaze locked onto the sculpture in front of him. For an instant, Count Juneau thought that he was looking at five living persons. A person madly in love, an adorable person, a shy person, a mesmerizingly beautiful person, and an icy, heartless person.

Count Juneau remained in that half-drunken stupor for a long moment before awakening.

“What a godly sculpture! The work of a Grandmaster!” Count Juneau’s mind instantly became agitated.

Based on Count Juneau’s hundred-plus years of appraising art, he naturally could sense how spiritually stirring this sculpture was, but upon taking a closer look, Count Juneau’s eyes began to shine. “This sculpting style...isn’t it that of that genius magus of the Ernst Institute, Linley?”

Just from the sculpting style alone, Count Juneau could tell who had carved this sculpture.

Count Juneau was very familiar with Linley, because the first time Linley had placed three sculptures for sale in the Proulx Gallery, he had been the one to purchase them. And then, when Linley’s artworks began appearing in the hall of the masters, the price of each sculpture had reached six thousand gold coins.

The genius of the Ernst Institute who was only seventeen years old!

On that business transaction alone, Count Juneau had turned a profit of over ten thousand gold coins. Naturally, Count Juneau would pay tremendous attention to Linley.

“It really is him.” Count Juneau saw the two characters for ‘Linley’ written on the lower corner of the statue.

And on the placard next to the sculpture, there was an explanation of who Linley was...

“The sculptor of this sculpture is named ‘Linley’. This year, he is seventeen years old, a graduate of the Ernst Institute, and a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank. In this day and age, he is, without a doubt, the number one genius magus in the entire Yulan continent, and even if we look at the history of the Yulan continent as a whole, he is still the number two genius magus in all of history.”

“But Linley isn’t just a genius magus. In the field of sculpting, he also has made amazing accomplishments. Although only seventeen, this sculpture of his, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, already carries the grandeur and the spirit of a Grandmaster level sculpture, especially considering the fact that this sculpture is so huge. Naturally, its value is all the more priceless. When you factor in the reality that this seventeen year old sculptor is also an ultimate genius magus...the value of this sculpture is simply unimaginable.”

“Our Proulx Gallery has the privilege to be authorized by Linley to exhibit this sculpture for five days. On April 21st, after the exhibition has completed, the Proulx Gallery will carry out the auction.”

Seeing this introduction, Count Juneau understood...

“The various nobles, magnates, and royals will all be moved and intrigued...” Count Juneau knew very well that this sort of sculpture definitely wasn’t something which a person of his level could hope to purchase.

“A seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank?” Upon rereading this part of the introduction, Count Juneau couldn’t help but sigh in amazement as well.

At the same time, Count Juneau’s admiration of this Linley deepened.

A person who was able to achieve such accomplishments in two different fields was definitely worthy of admiration.

“This sculpture should on roughly the same level as the sculptures of Grandmaster sculptors. Adding the fact that it is huge...and the status of the sculptor, a seventeen year old who is the number two genius magus in the entire history of the Yulan continent...the price is going to be sky-high.” Count Juneau made a mental prediction.

“April 21st!” Count Juneau was already beginning to anticipate this day.

As time passed, the people coming to visit this hall of the masters grew more and more in number. Many of the extremely wealthy families in the Holy Capital began to receive word of this as well.

....

Within Austoni’s office.

“Please inform his Majesty, King Wylder, that I don’t have the authority to make this decision. If his Majesty really would like to purchase this sculpture, we would like to invite him to attend on the 21st.” Austoni sent off the royal herald from a king.

When that herald left, Austoni’s face sank.

“What a joke. He actually dared to offer just a million gold pieces to directly buy this sculpture? In his dreams! Just yesterday, his Royal Majesty, King Clayde of the Kingdom of Fenlai, offered three million gold coins!”

After being on exhibition for just three days, over ten important personages had made offers to directly buy the sculpture.

“On the 21st, I’m afraid that we really are going to see a sky-high price.” Austoni secretly mused.

Chapter 12

Within the Debs clan’s private garden, Alice and Kalan were sitting together and discussing the question of marriage.

“Alice.” Kalan’s face was all smiles. “I’ve already discussed this with my father. Our engagement ceremony will be on June 18th, and our actual wedding ceremony will be on January 1st of the next year. Which is to say, it will be on the Yulan Festival day of next year.”

A hint of a smile appeared on Alice’s face as well.

“Next year, next year will be year 10000 of the Yulan calendar, right? For us to hold our wedding on the Yulan Festival of year 10000 of the Yulan calendar, that’ll be...so, so perfect.” The more she spoke, the happier she felt. Alice, too, began to beam.

Seeing Alice smile so happily, Kalan felt very content.

“Alice, hurry up and discuss this with your father, then prepare the list of guests from your family’s side for me so I can make arrangements as soon as possible.” Kalan urged.

“Okay.” Alice nodded slightly.

Kalan gently stroked Alice’s soft hair, his heart content.

But when he thought about the dire circumstances his clan was in, Kalan's heart began to grow frantic. Not long after him and Alice started their relationship, the Debs clan suffered a painful blow like they had never suffered before. The Dawson Conglomerate had cut them off!

The current success and glory of the Debs clan was inextricably linked to their relationship with the Dawson Conglomerate.

But then, last December, the Dawson Conglomerate publicly announced the dissolution of their business relationship with the Debs clan. What's more, they also reached out to every business union and trading clan within Fenlai City and informed them that they were looking for someone to replace the Debs clan in their previous position.

Additionally...

The Dawson Conglomerate's actions weren't just limited to that. The Dawson Conglomerate even began to suppress the business activities of the Debs clan, causing every single business operated by the Debs clan to suffer losses.

"Why is the Dawson Conglomerate suppressing my clan like this? The Debs clan hasn't offended the Dawson Conglomerate." Kalan felt extremely vexed. As the next heir and successor to the clan, Kalan naturally cared greatly about this affair.

And because these issues occurred soon after Kalan and Alice started their relationship, there were quite a few clan members who now believed that Alice was the bearer of disastrously bad luck.

Otherwise, why would the Dawson Conglomerate, whom they had worked alongside with for so many years, suddenly turn on them?

Fortunately, over all these years, the Debs clan had managed to accumulate massive wealth. Although their losses were great, the foundation of the Debs clan was still intact. But the leader of the Debs clan was aware that, due to unclear reasons, the Dawson Conglomerate was now suppressing their businesses. This was causing the Debs clan to have lost all hope in the 'business' side of their activities.

After all, no one was willing to offend the massive behemoth which was the Dawson Conglomerate.

Thus, the only choice the Debs clan had was to embark on a certain other route.

Shaking his head and casting these thoughts aside, Kalan laughed as he looked at Alice. "Alice, I heard that yesterday, the Proulx Gallery began to exhibit an

extremely incredible work of art. Supposedly, it's on the Grandmaster level. Many people have gone there to take a look. Would you like to go with me?"

Alice was feeling bored as well. "Alright."

.....

Kalan and Alice were riding in a carriage towards the Proulx Gallery.

"This sculpture is supposedly extremely extraordinary. These past few days, I've been so busy arranging our engagement and wedding that I haven't had the chance to take you to check it out." Kalan was the first to leap off the carriage, and then, in a very gentlemanly fashion, helped Alice out as well.

Side by side, Alice and Kalan walked towards the Proulx Gallery.

"Big brother Kalan, look at all those people!" Alice's eyes were shining as she pointed.

Deep within the Proulx Gallery, at the hall of the masters, there was a sea of people. But within the hall of the masters, everything was extremely orderly, entering from one door and exiting from another. Every person was only permitted three minutes or so of viewing time.

After three minutes, the people currently in the hall of the masters were forced to leave. If they wanted to view it again....

Fine! Go back and wait in line again!

"What a long line." Kalan felt somewhat amazed as well. In all these years, he had never seen the Proulx Gallery so packed with people before.

Kalan and Alice both obediently got in line and waited for nearly twenty minutes. Only then was it their group's turn to go and enter the hall of the masters. In one large group, they were ushered into the hall of the masters. Immediately, all of them headed towards the front.

Curious, Kalan and Alice naturally rushed to the front as well.

But that moment when Alice first spotted the sculpture, she froze as though she had been struck by lightning. Standing there, she stared stupidly at that enormous sculpture. Those five beautifully, immaculately carved female figures, each of them carrying a unique aura of their own.

Others were absorbed in contemplating the meanings hidden within this 'Awakening From the Dream'.

But when Alice saw this giant sculpture, her mind couldn't help but begin to replay memories of every single event she had previously experienced with Linley.

The first time, just as she was despairing, Linley had descended like a god from the heavens.

On the balcony, the two of them hiding in the corners and chatting an entire night away.

....

One scene after another played in her mind. Alice was totally dumbstruck. She really had no idea that this famous Grandmaster-level sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', had her as the subject.

"Lin....Linley..." Alice's current emotions were extremely complicated.

She stared at the introductory text on the side.

"The sculptor of this sculpture is named 'Linley'. This year, he is seventeen years old, a graduate of the Ernst Institute, and a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank. In this day and age, he is, without a doubt, the number one genius magus in the entire Yulan continent, and even if we look at the history of the Yulan continent as a whole, he is still the number two genius magus in all of history."

"But Linley isn't just a genius magus. In the field of sculpting, he also has made amazing accomplishments. Although only seventeen, this sculpture of his, 'Awakening From the Dream'...."

Seeing those lines of words, Alice was dumbfounded yet again.

"It's Linley. It's Linley." Alice stared at the placard unbelievably. "A dual-element magus of the seventh rank? He's already a magus of the seventh rank? But...but just last year, he was just a magus of the fifth rank."

Alice had no idea that before they had broken up, Linley had become a magus of the sixth rank. Only...Linley had never been given the chance to let her know.

"Awakening From the Dream. This sculpture is called, 'Awakening From the Dream'." Staring at the five female figures in the sculpture, especially that last one

with the slight aura of heartlessness, Alice suddenly understood the true reason why Linley had given this sculpture the name, 'Awakening From the Dream.'

"The dreamer...has awakened?" Alice felt that her mind was a total mess.

As the first man she had ever truly cared for, in the bottom of Alice's heart, there was always a special place reserved for Linley. But when she discovered that Linley had given this sculpture the name, 'Awakening From the Dream', she suddenly felt as though something had disappeared from her heart.

That sort of feeling...was very difficult to bear.

Alice suddenly noticed that by her side, Kalan's fists were knotted, and an extremely unpleasant look was on his face. His veins were bulging out, and his face was terrifyingly grim. His eyes flashed with dark light as he stared a deathly gaze at this sculpture.

"Big Brother Kalan!" Worried, Alice called to him.

But Kalan paid her no mind.

"Linley, you...you go too far." Kalan was filled with boundless, fiery rage. In the past, Kalan was rather well-disposed towards Linley. But in the depths of his heart, Kalan somewhat looked down on Linley. As far as Kalan was concerned, no matter how hard Linley worked, he could never be able to match Kalan's clan.

After all, his clan was hitched to the enormous war machine that was the Dawson Conglomerate.

But in what, just five months?

His Debs clan had been abandoned by the Dawson Conglomerate. And Linley? Out of nowhere, he became a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank. What's more, he was acclaimed as the number one genius magus of this age.

Even in the long history of the Yulan continent, there was only one person slightly better than Linley.

"A seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank, and a sculptor approaching the level of the Grandmasters." Kalan suddenly felt enormous pressure.

This person was simply too incredible.

But shortly after, Kalan only felt boundless fury.

Because the inspiration for this sculpture was his fiancée!

"Hey, take a look. Isn't this girl really similar to the woman in this sculpture?" A voice suddenly rang out within the hall of the masters, and instantly, over ten heads turned to stare at Alice. The hall suddenly became a hotbed of commotion and discussion.

Linley's sculpting abilities were simply too amazing. He had totally captured Alice's grace and charm in this sculpture.

From their very first glance at Alice, those viewers had the feeling...that the girl in front of them and the female carved into 'Awakening From the Dream' were incredibly similar. In fact, they could totally be considered the same person. That unique gaze. That slightly sharp, arched nose.

"Miss, dare I ask what your relationship is with Master Linley?" An old man with a head full of white hair, at least a century old, asked very courteously towards Alice.

In the field of sculpting, Linley had already reached the level of master.

Linley's skill in sculpting was enough to cause these collectors who had decades or centuries of experience in sculpting to prostrate themselves in admiration. Respectfully addressing him as 'Master' was something which came from their hearts. Based on this old man's century-plus years of experience in appraising stone sculptures, he naturally could tell that the woman carved into the sculpture was most likely a person whom Linley had shared a period of turbulent love.

Alice felt rather awkward, and couldn't help but turn to look at Kalan.

"Oh, Kalan, you are here as well." The old man looked at Kalan. Old people naturally being as sly as a fox, the old man naturally could tell that Kalan and Alice's relationship was not a simple one. "Kalan, who is this young lady?"

Although Kalan felt extremely unhappy, he still modestly bowed and said, "Milord Duke Berner [Ba'na], this is Miss Alice, my fiancée."

"Fiancée?" Duke Berner cast a meaningful glance at Kalan and Alice, then laughed, asking no more.

....

Pulling Alice by the hand, as through running for his life, Kalan quickly fled back to the Debs clan's manor.

The leader of the Debs clan, Kalan's father, Bernard, stared at his son in disbelief. "What did you just say? The inspiration for that sculpture being exhibited in the Proulx Gallery is Alice?"

Bernard was generally rather doting towards his son.

When his son said he was going to marry Alice, Bernard didn't object. But just a few days after his son had firmed up his relationship with Alice, the Dawson Conglomerate had suddenly decided to break off relations with the Debs clan for no apparent reason at all. With regards to this affair, Bernard had been constantly begging to meet with the upper level management of the Dawson Conglomerate for a meeting.

Over the past few months, Bernard had been busy dealing with this issue, and was so busy that he hadn't even had the free time to bother going about to viewing the sculptures at the Proulx Gallery.

"Alice. The inspiration is Alice?" The expression on Bernard's face immediately grew ugly.

Kalan nodded. "Yes, father. Although Alice and I haven't yet gotten formally engaged, once we do, Alice will be formally introduced to many of the nobles in the Holy Capital. That sculpture of Linley's, 'Awakening From the Dream', will definitely make us the laughingstock of the city."

Bernard was silent for a while, and then frowned as he asked Kalan, "How bad is it? Is there anything shameful or degrading about this sculpture?"

"Father, in the past, between Linley and Alice, they had a period of..." Kalan explained in a fuzzy manner. "And this sculpture is about the affairs of Linley and Alice."

Bernard no longer spoke. He only began to frown severely.

After a while, Bernard said to his son, "Kalan, if I ask you to give up Alice, would you be willing?" Kalan resolutely shook his head. After all, he was only eighteen years old.

Bernard nodded slightly. "Don't worry about Alice. I will handle this matter. You don't need to worry about it."

Kalan nodded, then suddenly he gritted his teeth. Staring at his father, he said, "Father, Linley is definitely unhappy at the fact that Alice and I are together. What's

more, Linley's potential is too great. I think...that we should perhaps consider if we can figure out a way to kill Linley?"

Chapter 13

"Kill Linley?" Bernard looked at his son. "Kalan, why should we kill this Linley? He's just a master sculptor. Will he impact the Debs clan somehow?"

The news of Linley becoming a magus of the seventh rank hadn't been widely publicized in Fenlai City yet. In addition, recently Bernard had been absorbed in dealing with the frustrating affairs of his clan, which was why he didn't know anything about Linley.

Kalan nodded. "Father, Linley is seventeen years old this year, but he's already produced a Grandmaster-level sculpture. More importantly...he is currently the number one genius magus of the Yulan continent. Even looking back at all of history, he is still the number two genius magus of all time of the Yulan continent. Because he...is a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank."

"A seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank?"

Bernard sucked in a cold breath of air. His intuition was telling him that this Linley would be a threat to his clan.

"This Linley cannot be permitted to live." Bernard immediately said.

Hearing these words from his father, Kalan couldn't help but smile. But then, a heartbeat later, Bernard frowned. "Wait. The number two genius magus of all time will definitely be an extremely incredible person in the future. How could the Radiant Church, the Cult of Shadows, and the Four Great Empires possibly let someone like this slip through their fingers? It's quite possible that Linley has already struck up a relationship with the Radiant Church."

"Kalan, this Linley, cannot be killed by us." Looking at Kalan, Bernard spoke in a serious tone.

"Father, he's just a dual-element magus of the seventh rank." Kalan's face was a mask of urgency. Suddenly, he lowered his voice. "Father, we don't need to necessarily dirty our own hands to get rid of Linley. We can spend some money to invite others to do the deed. Just like when we killed that Court Minister."

Bernard was silent for a moment. "Kalan, you don't need to interfere in this matter anymore. I will handle everything."

Bernard wasn't saying that he would kill Linley. This made Kalan extremely irritable and unable to be at ease.

.....

The dark of the night. Bernard had arrived at a pre-reserved deluxe room within a hotel, and there was a white-haired old man there waiting for him.

"Mr. Bernard." Upon seeing Bernard, that white-haired old man couldn't help but grin at him.

Bernard nodded. "Mr. Bayonet. This time I have come to see you for the purpose of asking your assistance."

"Speak, speak. You are an old customer." The white-haired old man was still beaming.

Bernard spoke bluntly. "Two things. First, I hope you can destroy for me that 'Awakening From the Dream' sculpture currently on display within the Proulx Gallery." Bernard was quite clear that actually spiriting this sculpture out of the Proulx Gallery was an impossibility.

But destroying it was a task of much lower complexity.

"Destroy the sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'?" The white-haired old man said, startled.

"What, is your organization, 'Saber', not capable of carrying this mission out?" Bernard laughed lightly.

Of the four major assassin's guilds of the Yulan continent, each was unique in their own way. This one, Saber, possessed an exceedingly strong force. As long as the price was enough, they would even dare to assassinate a Cardinal.

But of course, if the contract was to assassinate a Saint-level combatant, that was perhaps a level of difficulty that was a bit too high.

"Could it be that even you are afraid offending the Proulx Gallery?" Bernard was somewhat suspicious.

"No. Of course we don't care about a branch of the Proulx Gallery. Go ahead and advise us as to your second requirement." The white-haired old man suddenly said.

An assassin's guild, by its very nature, was going to offend people. They even dared to offend the Radiant Church. Who wouldn't they dare to offend?

Bernard suppressed the curiosity in his heart. "The second matter is, I hope that you can assassinate Linley."

The white-haired old man finally laughed helplessly. Shaking his head, he said to Bernard, "Mr. Bernard, please forgive us, but we won't be able to accept either of your two missions. My deepest regrets."

"Unable to accept?" Bernard rose to his feet violently, staring at the white-haired old man in disbelief. "Mr. Bayonet, I know how much strength your organization has. Since when did you become unwilling to dare to accept a small mission such as this?" Bernard totally could not accept that this was the end result of his trip here.

After all, this organization dared to even assassinate senior ministers of the Four Great Empires and Cardinals of the Radiant Church. But they didn't dare assassinate Linley?

"It isn't that we don't dare, it's that we don't wish to accept this mission. As for the reason why, our organization has no need to tell you, right?" The expression on the white-haired old man's face had turned cold.

Bernard hurriedly smiled. "Forgive me, Mr. Bayonet. Since you are unwilling to accept this mission, then I must take my leave."

The white-haired old man nodded.

After Bernard departed, the white-haired old man slowly rose to his feet, mumbling to himself, "This Bernard. Out of all the missions he could ask us for, why did he have to try and destroy a sculpture? And he even wants to assassinate Linley? I absolutely must report this affair to the Old Master. I imagine once the Old Master learns that we turned this mission down, he will be quite pleased."

The white-haired old man was one of the founding elders of the Saber organization.

However, precisely because he was too old, he didn't carry out any missions anymore. Most of his time, he spent his life enjoying everything this megacity, Fenlai City, had to offer. On occasion, he would receive visitors from some of the wealthier nobles.

But as for the 'Old Master' he was referring to...

Within the Saber organization, the Old Master was a person of legend. Even when the guild leader of Saber met the Old Master, he would very respectfully hail him as 'Old Master'. In the entirety of this organization, there was perhaps no one who was more senior than this Old Master.

.....

Within the Proulx Gallery. The fourth day of the exhibition of the sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream.'

In the middle of the hall of the masters, something quite bizarre was happening. Based on the usual rules of the Proulx Gallery, each visitor to the hall of the masters should only be allowed three minutes of viewing time per visit before leaving to allow someone else to come in. If they wanted to view the sculpture again, they would have to get in line again.

But within the hall of the masters, one particular guest had already been there for nearly two hours. This was totally against the rules!

This guest appeared to be thirty or forty years old. He wore a loose-fitting long robe, and his arms were hidden by the sleeves of the robes and crossed over his chest. That long, black robe was casually loosened, and he appeared to be very much absorbed in viewing the sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream.'

And right now, the several extremely powerful-looking guards standing in front of 'Awakening From the Dream' were all discussing this black-haired man in a low voice.

"What sort of relationship does this man have with Mr. Austoni? We were actually instructed not to shoo him away. For him to be here for such a long period of time in the hall of the masters is against the rules."

"Don't worry about it. Let's just quietly protect the statue."

"What are you afraid of? The Gallery has set up a magical defensive formation around the sculpture. It is totally impossible for someone to attempt to steal it, especially given how large it is. Who can possibly steal such a large sculpture out from under our eyes?"

The guards were all in a relatively relaxed mood.

After all, stealing this huge sculpture would be an extremely hard task, while damaging it was of no benefit to anybody. Who would do such a thing?

"Wow, what an excellent sculpture. It really has flavor." The thirty to forty year old man knitted his brows as he carefully inspected the sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'. And then, he glanced once more at the introduction. "A seventeen year old kid. I really anticipate his future progress."

Time passed. One group of people after another entered the hall of the masters.

But this man continued to stand in that one spot, carefully viewing and enjoying the sight of this sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'.

"What smoothly flowing lines and marks, so clean without any sign of hesitation." A slightly enchanted look was on this man's face. "How absolutely mesmerizing. And this girl! Her unique characteristics were completely drawn out by the sculptor, to the point of being more attractive than a real person."

Within the hall, groups of visitors continued to arrive and depart.

Many of the visitors were lining up multiple times and viewing the sculpture multiple times. A Grandmaster-level sculpture such as this, to those genuine aficionados of sculpture, was something they could admire for an entire day without feeling bored.

"Time's up! Next group!" The employee of the Proulx Gallery called out loudly. Instantly, a large group of people began heading for the exit obediently, while the next group of people began to come in. But just at this disorderly moment...

"Boom!" "Boom!" "Boom!"

Several explosive sounds could be heard, and suddenly, the hall of the masters was covered with a layer of thick fog. The previous guests totally began to run wild, screaming in fear or cursing angrily. The air was filled with noise.

At this time, the guards charged with protecting the sculpture also grew nervous.

"Not good." Seeing this spectacle, the guards knew that something was happening.

"Goddamit."

The man dressed in a loose robe frowned, cursing in an annoyed manner. His previously drowsy eyes cleared and scanned forwards. At this time, four blurs suddenly charged towards that sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'.

When these four blurs made their charge, the guards had already drawn their weapons, while at the same time, many experts of the Proulx Gallery hidden around

the area came charging forward as well. If the sculpture currently on display within the Proulx Gallery was destroyed, then this would be an unmitigated disaster!

“Whoosh!”

One of the four blurs, a white blur, moved in an extremely bizarre manner. Like a piece of white paper, he floated about, easily dodging past the attempted blockade by the guards. At the same time, he stretched out with his black dagger, aiming a stab at the sculpture.

Based on his attack power, with this stab, the entire sculpture would be shattered.

“Thud!” ‘Awakening From the Dream’ suddenly glowed. The dagger landed on the glow surrounding the sculpture, but did not damage it.

“Lightguard?” The white blur muttered. The dagger in his hand suddenly flushed with a layer of blood-red color, and he stabbed at the sculpture with it once more. Instantly, a clear ringing sound could be heard as the Lightguard spell was totally shattered.

“Not good.” The four guards were getting desperate. Even the protective magic set up by a light-style magus of the seventh rank had been so easily broken. And, because the situation was too chaotic, many of the Gallery’s experts were not able to reach or block in time.

But these guards next to the sculpture were being blocked in turn by the other three blurs.

That man in a loose-fitting robe who hadn’t moved this entire time, suddenly radiated a fierce look from his previously drowsy-looking eyes.

“Swish!”

A very soft noise could be heard, while at the same time, the white colored blur suddenly twitched. Then, with a ‘rip’ sound, he suddenly split into two pieces, and fresh blood spurted out from his bifurcated body. Even the three people entangling the bodyguards suddenly split into two pieces. All of them were as dead as dead can be.

.....

Shortly afterwards, the Proulx Gallery returned to normal, while that man in a loose robe slowly departed from the Proulx Gallery. Outside the Proulx Gallery, there was a carriage waiting for him, and another person as well.

It was the person whom Kalan's father, Bernard, had addressed as 'Mr. Bayonet'.

Upon seeing this thirty or forty year old man come towards him, the elder immediately said in a voice of respect, "Old Master."

"Mm. You did a good job this time." The thirty or forty year old man laughed as he praised. But then, he said in an unhappy voice, "I didn't expect that the Bloodrose organization would sink to such depths. Could it be that they don't know what a huge sin it is to attempt to destroy such a precious work of art?"

The Bloodrose organization, like the Saber organization, was one of the four primary assassin's guilds.

"Old Master, where should head to, today?" That Mr. Bayonet asked.

The man thought for a while, then said, "It's been a year or two since I've visited the Jade Water Paradise. In the past, I've always had those girls come out to my place instead. This time...I shall visit the Jade Water Paradise in person. Only when I spend some time with young ladies will I, as well, feel young at heart. Haha..." He began to laugh loudly.

"Yes, Old Master." The white-haired old man said courteously. In Mr. Bayonet's heart, he actually was always curious about one thing; how old, exactly, this middle-aged man was. This was because, amongst all the assassins produced by the Saber organization, he himself was in the final group of assassins to be personally trained by the Old Master himself.

As for the very first group of assassins trained by the Old Master, either they had all been killed, or they had died of old age!

"What are you thinking about? Move it!" From within the carriage came the sound of the man's voice.

Mr. Bayonet immediately began to drive the carriage forward, heading towards the Jade Water Paradise.

Chapter 14

Within the private reading room of Bernard, leader of the Debs clan.

“What? You failed?” Bernard stared at the woman in the red robes. “Even if you failed, why can’t you continue making further attempts? Since when did the Bloodrose organization give up so easily?”

Bernard was extremely dissatisfied.

When he went to ask for the help of the Saber organization, he was refused. He successfully enlisted the services of Bloodrose, but Bloodrose was only willing to agree to destroy the sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’. As for killing Linley, the price they demanded was far too high, as high as the price for an assassination of a Cardinal! Such an astronomical price, the Debs clan was unable to pay.

Per the words of Bloodrose, assassinating Linley would cause them to simultaneously offend both the Radiant Church as well as the Dawson Conglomerate.

What’s more...

Nowadays, Linley was a master sculptor. A master sculptor held an exalted societal status, and many people with rank and power esteemed master sculptors. Killing Linley meant killing a master sculptor, which would generate a degree of hatred towards Bloodrose amongst those sculpture aficionados.

This was why the cost they demanded to assassinate Linley was actually on par with the cost to assassinate a Cardinal.

“We are no longer willing to accept this assignment. We are willing to return the compensation you gave us.” The red robed woman said, her face cold.

“Can you tell me the reason why?” Bernard had no idea what was going on.

The destruction of a sculpture shouldn’t be too difficult. How could they give up after failing just a single time?

“If we tell you the reason, then we will no longer return the fees you provided to us. Do you agree?” The red robed woman said calmly.

An assassination organization was also a type of information broker. They were willing to sell information as well.

“Done.” As the leader of the Debs clan, Bernard could be magnanimous.

That red robed woman said softly, “I can tell you this. Amongst the admirers of that sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, there is a person whom our organization

definitely does not wish to offend. And this person is not someone whom your Debs clan is able to offend either.”

“Alright. My report is complete.” With a smile, the red robed woman immediately departed.

Bernard was incredibly angry.

This red robed woman wasn’t even willing to disclose the identity of this person Bloodrose didn’t wish to offend. But Bernard understood one thing: Someone capable of causing trepidation for Bloodrose was definitely an incredible person. A report on such a person would definitely also be incredibly expensive.

.....

Year 9999 of the Yulan calendar, April 21st. Within the dedicated auction hall at the Proulx Gallery.

This auction hall was split into three levels. The first level had ordinary seats, while the second level had stand-alone booths which only major nobles and extremely wealthy people were qualified to enter. The price to enter those booths was terrifyingly high. As for the third level, it was just a single, extremely large hall, also decorated very lavishly.

At this moment, the hundreds of seats in the first level were beginning to get filled up, despite the fact that the price of each seat here was a hundred gold coins. As for the ten or so private booths on the second level, based on the locations of the seats, the prices varied from a thousand to ten thousand gold coins.

But the third level? That wasn’t opened to the public at all.

The fame of this sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, was extremely resounding now. Many of the people currently in the auction hall were some of the wealthiest, most powerful noble families in the Yulan continent. But precisely because there were only so few seats while there were so many nobles present, these standard seats, which supposedly cost a hundred gold coins each, were being sold by scalpers outside for a ridiculous sum of money.

The Debs clan, as a local clan, had a special relationship with the Proulx Gallery, and were able to acquire seats in the private booth with the poorest positioning.

In truth, aside from the Debs clan, all of the others who were present in the second level booths belonged to extremely famous and wealthy clans throughout the Yulan continent. They were far more powerful than the Debs clan, for example...the

Dawson clan of the Dawson Conglomerate. Even they were only on the second level. But of course, the representatives of the Dawson clan here were not members in the direct line of descent and succession.

“Alice, walk on the inside.”

This time, six people had come from the Debs clan. Alice was walking between Kalan and Kalan’s mother, and was even wearing a hat that was pressed down on her head. Very quickly, the six of them reached the second level.

Within this second level were the greatest clans of the Yulan continent.

Upon seeing who was in the second level hallway, Bernard, leader of the Debs clan, immediately began to modestly greet everyone present. Here, the Debs clan meant absolutely nothing. It was like the evaluation Yale had once given them in private; they were a ‘minor clan’.

Right. In the eyes of these clans whose influence spanned the entire Yulan continent, if a clan’s area of influence was limited to a single kingdom, then that clan was nothing more than a minor clan.

The six people from the Debs clan entered their booth.

“There will come a day when my Debs clan will be like those clans. No; we will be even stronger.” Kalan said to himself.

For the Debs clan, during this trip, failure was not an option.

No matter what, it was better to have this sculpture located within their own manor, rather than the manor of an outsider. After all, in June, Kalan would be having his engagement ceremony with Alice, and by then, many people would know that Alice was becoming a member of the Debs clan. But even though ‘failure was not an option’, in reality, their financial ability to succeed was a major issue as well.

“Big Brother Kalan.” Alice took a seat next to Kalan.

In a place like this, surrounded by hugely powerful clans, Alice, too, felt rather constrained and pressured. After all, in this place, even the Debs clan counted for little, much less a minor noble like Alice and her clan.

“Don’t worry. Inside this booth, the people below won’t be able to see you at all. That Linley really has gone too far. He actually...” Whenever Kalan thought of that sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, he would burst with rage. Anyone with

some understanding of sculpture would be able to guess that Linley and Alice had a romantic history together.

After all, if they hadn't shared a period of true love, how could Linley have produced such a godly work of art?

If Kalan were to really marry Alice, there would most likely be many people who would secretly speculate about what the relationship between Alice and Linley was like. For someone of Kalan's social status, how could he bear such embarrassment?

.....

The third level of the auction hall.

Inside, there were only four people. The Proulx Gallery's Managing Director Maia, Austoni, Linley, and Yale.

"Haha, Director Maia, which one is Linley?" A loud, exuberant laugh boomed out.

Leaning on his cane, Director Maia went over to welcome the man, while Linley and Yale both immediately went to welcome him as well. "Your Majesty!"

The person who had come was the king of the Kingdom of Fenlai. He was the pride of the kingdom; the Golden Lion, King Clayde. Being both the king of Fenlai as well as mighty warrior of the ninth rank was indeed something worthy of admiration.

Linley carefully inspected this Clayde.

This king was built extremely muscularly, and his head of long, golden hair billowed about him wildly, giving off the aura of a lion with enormous explosive power. His entire person naturally radiated a domineering aura that made hearts quail in fear.

Clayde looked at Linley. "If my guess is correct, this one must be Master Linley."

"Your Majesty, please, just call me Linley." Linley immediately said.

As a matter of fact, Linley felt quite helpless. Ever since the sculpture 'Awakening From the Dream' had been put on display, many people, upon seeing Linley, would humbly address him as 'Master Linley'. This was not feigned courtesy. Even Marquis Jebbs of the Lucas clan, who really was not willing to part with the warblade 'Slaughterer', was still filled with the utmost admiration for Linley.

"Good enough." Clayde was extremely blunt. "And this must be Yale, right? Yale, how's your father doing?"

“My father is doing very well. Unfortunately, he isn’t currently within the Holy Union, as if he was, he definitely would’ve come in person.” Yale said modestly.

Clayde nodded slightly.

“Director Maia, who else has come today?” Clayde called out casually.

Director Maia smiled. “Let’s wait a while longer. I expect that Cardinal Lampson [Lan’pu’sen] and Cardinal Guillermo will be arriving as well.”

Generally speaking, the third level was only used for welcoming guests which the Proulx Gallery held in the highest regard.

The windows of the third level were made with a special type of glass. Those on the outside were unable to see inside, but those on the inside could clearly see the outside. This sort of glass was specially designed and produced by alchemists, and was extremely expensive. Most places weren’t able to afford such materials.

“Lords Guillermo and Lampson have arrived.” Director Maia’s position allowed him to see the outside hallway.

Linley, Yale, and even King Clayde all went to welcome these two men with great warmth and enthusiasm. In a group, they went to greet these two Cardinals of the Radiant Church. Cardinal Guillermo and Linley had met once before, while Cardinal Lampson was rather pudgy. When he laughed, his eyes turned into a thin slit. He seemed very adorable.

“Linley. Right?” Lampson immediately gave Linley a big, warm hug.

“Lord Lampson.” Linley said respectfully.

And then, the seven people within the third floor, being Cardinal Lampson, Cardinal Guillermo, Maia, Yale, Austoni, King Clayde, and Linley all sat down together, peering out of the windows at the spectacle below.

From their vantage point, they could even see into what was going on in the booths on the second level.

“Third Bro, look.” Yale lightly nudged Linley by the arm and nodded below.

Following Yale’s gaze, Linley looked over as well. Suddenly, he discovered that within one of the second level booths, Kalan and Alice were both present. Right now, Alice and Kalan were holding hands while seated together on a sofa, engaging in conversation.

"I didn't expect her to come." Yale said softly to Linley.

Linley only smiled calmly.

"Linley, what are you guys talking about?" The pudgy Cardinal Lampson chortled at Linley.

"Nothing." Linley shook his head.

Guillermo patted Clayde on the shoulder. "Clayde, I must say, your management of the Kingdom of Fenlai has been stellar. You've actually managed to produce an incredible talent like Linley. Before this, I really had no idea that this genius magus, Linley, also had reached such an incredible level of achievement in the art of stonesculpting."

Yale, Linley, Clayde, Guillermo, Lampson, and Director Maia continued to engage in idle conversation while watching the activities below.

All of the seats on the first floor of the auction hall were now filled.

On the main platform, the sculpture 'Awakening From the Dream' was placed, covered with a piece of cloth. On the platform, a beautiful serving girl stood on each side of the sculpture, while a golden-haired gentleman walked onto the platform with a smile. Looking around himself, he said in a bright voice, "Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome all of you to this auction for Master Linley's sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'."

This middle-aged man behaved extremely leisurely. Slowly, he said, "Every single guest who has come today has a grand reputation. In particular, our Gallery was fortunate enough to be able to invite Lord Cardinal Guillermo to attend as well." This middle-aged man bowed slightly towards the third level.

Instantly, everyone below rose to their feet, filling the auction hall with the sound of their applause.

"We also have Lord Cardinal Lampson present." Another round of energetic applause.

"His Majesty, the ruler of our Kingdom of Fenlai, has arrived as well."

"Additionally, the genius magus and genius sculptor, Master Linley, is present today."

This auctioneer rattled off one name after another, and each time he did, there was a storm of applause. To these nobles, a Cardinal of the Radiant Church, the ruler of a Kingdom, and that genius of a level which the Yulan continent would rarely see in its entire history, all were worthy of their admiration.

“Master Linley?”

Within her booth, Alice stared out of the window at the third level, but unfortunately, all she could see was black glass.

But on the third level.

Linley could clearly see Alice’s face...and the slightly lost look in her eyes.

Chapter 15

Standing in the middle of the platform, that golden-haired, middle aged man continued to boast, “When discussing the Ten Masterpieces, in this day and age, the lowest valuation of one of the Ten Masterpieces is 5.28 million gold coins, while the highest is the ‘Bloody-eyed Maned Lion’, which recently was auctioned off in the Proulx Gallery branch at the Yulan Empire for a price of 13 million gold coins!”

All of the nobles and wealthy merchants below grew silent.

These prices were downright terrifying.

“The materials for the sculpture, ‘Bloody-eyed Maned Lion’, were collected from an actual, Saint-level ‘Bloody-eyed Maned Lion’, while the sculptor was Grandmaster Hoover from over a hundred thousand years ago. In the past ten thousand years, our Yulan continent has produced just two Grandmaster level sculptors; Master Proulx, and Master Hope Jensen. These two both reached the level of Grandmaster.”

The golden-haired man let out a sudden laugh.

“However, from what I know, every single Grandmaster sculptor in history....no...let’s not discuss Grandmasters for now...even the vast majority of master sculptors were only acclaimed as ‘masters’ after their first century of life. Even if they hadn’t reached a hundred, they were at least in their seventies or eighties. Has there ever been anyone who became a master before the age of thirty?”

The golden-haired man looked at his audience. “In the past, no. But now? There is.”

"The incredible Master Linley is a genius. He is seventeen years old! He is a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank. In the field of magic, he is the number two genius in the entire history of the Yulan continent. But his accomplishments in the field of sculpting, despite only being seventeen years of age, is well known by everyone here as well."

As he spoke, the golden-haired man turned to stare at the sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'.

The two female attendants stepped forward and removed the covering cloth, revealing the actual sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'.

"This is the sculpture produced by Master Linley. Based on the investigation performed by our Gallery, this sculpture was completed last December, during the days of that huge blizzard. In other words, it was completed when Linley was still sixteen years old." The golden-haired man laughed. "At the time, I had been wondering why that blizzard was so unnaturally fierce. But now, thinking back, I imagine it must have had something to do with the impending birth of this sculpture of Master Linley's."

Instantly, all of the nobles and magnates below laughed.

"Alright, enough with the small talk." Pointing at the sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', the golden-haired man said, "This sculpture has absolutely reached the Grandmaster level. More importantly, this sculpture is extremely large. To be absolutely honest, we could actually chop it into five pieces and auction each piece off separately."

The wealthy nobles below all roared in laughter as they began to chatter.

"I'm just joking, of course. Each of the figures pictured in this sculpture has its own aura and charm. When put together, they seem to form a wondrous love story. I believe many connoisseurs of stonesculpting who are present can sense the sad but beautiful love story behind this sculpture."

The golden-haired man sighed. "Each of these five figures have been carved at the Grandmaster level. When put together, they will give the viewer a very unique, very special sensation. I am absolutely unable to guess what the price for this sculpture will be."

"And most importantly of all, when Master Linley finished this sculpture, he was sixteen! Just sixteen years old!" The golden-haired man's voice began to boom. "I have never, in my life, found myself at such a loss for words. I have no way of verbally expressing the admiration I feel for Master Linley. He...is a true genius!"

These words caused yet another commotion amongst the watching nobles.

For a sixteen year old to complete a sculpture like this was nothing short of a miracle.

But in their booth, the Debs clan was totally silent.

"That detestable bastard." Kalan was filled with rage and hatred towards this golden-haired auctioneer. After that little speech of his, the bidding war for this sculpture was sure to become even more extreme.

"I simply cannot imagine Master Linley's future accomplishments. And that is precisely why this sculpture, the first sculpture made by Master Linley to shock the world, is so valuable! Alas...unfortunately, I myself don't have much money, as otherwise, even if I had to sell off all my family's possessions, I would still buy this sculpture." The golden-haired man said with a laugh. "Alright, let's start the auction. Bids will start at 1 million gold coins. I trust no one will object?"

A million gold coins!

That was the starting point for this auction?

Many of the lesser nobles who had been hoping to get lucky were suddenly brought to their senses. If they weren't members of an extremely wealthy, powerful clan, they shouldn't even think about trying to fight over this sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'.

"Each bid must be at least 100,000 gold coins higher than the last." The golden-haired man added. "Alright. The auction for Master Linley's sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', now officially begins!"

Immediately, the auction hall fell silent.

"1.5 million!" A noble seated in the bottom row immediately made a bid.

Linley was watching the bidding going on below from the third floor. From Linley's clothes, the little Shadowmouse, Bebe, also stuck his head out to watch the proceedings.

"Boss, in the future, I can eat all the roast chicken and roast duck that I want, and drink all the wine I want as well." Bebe's voice rang out in Linley's mind.

"No problem." Linley rubbed Bebe's little head.

As far as he was concerned, Bebe was just like a brother to him.

"Yeah! In the future, life will be sweet." Bebe was so excited that his eyes gleamed. Craning his neck, he leaned over to look down. "Whoah. Two million gold already. Higher, higher please." Bebe constantly urged the price to go higher. Watching Bebe, Linley couldn't help but laugh.

King Clayde, the king of the Kingdom of Fenlai, warmly clapped Linley on his back. "Linley, let me help give you a boost!"

"Austoni, five million gold coins!" Clayde instructed Austoni.

Austoni walked over to a speaking platform, then said in a bright voice, "His Majesty, Clayde, bids five million gold coins!"

"Thank you, Majesty." Linley immediately said.

"Haha, no worries." Clayde put his arm around Linley's shoulders in a friendly manner. "Linley, regardless of whether or not you choose to join me, there's no reason for us to constantly maintain decorum as ruler and subject." Clayde spoke very casually and freely.

Linley was beginning to feel well-disposed towards Clayde.

He truly was a very magnetic, charismatic leader.

"Your Majesty, please forgive me, but I would like to go back and consult with my father first. If nothing out of the ordinary happens, I intend to remain in the Kingdom of Fenlai." Linley said with a smile.

"Yes, you absolutely should talk this over with your father." Clayde frowned very slightly. "But Linley, from what I hear, your father has left Wushan township. I spent some time investigating, but couldn't figure out where your father has gone to. It is as though...he's disappeared."

As soon as Linley's fame had exploded, as part of his plan to pull Linley to his side, Clayde sent some people to meet with the family of Linley.

But Hogg was no longer at Wushan township.

"My father isn't currently at Wushan township?" Linley felt a bit suspicious, but then he laughed. "Perhaps my father has gone somewhere else for a while. Father can't always be at Wushan township."

"Perhaps." Clayde didn't continue with this topic.

Hogg truly had hidden himself quite well. Otherwise, if the ruler of a kingdom wished to find someone, how could they fail to?

.....

Within a private booth on the second level.

“Five million gold coins?! Dogshit!” Kalan swore foully, something he rarely did.

Bernard, clan leader of the Debs clan, had a gloomy look on his face. He said in a low voice, “Kalan, you should know what sort of situation the clan is currently facing. Right now, the clan’s future is uncertain. We can’t waste too much money on this affair. Based on our clan’s deliberations, at most we can spare eight million gold coins for you. This is our bottom line.”

Kalan nodded.

Kalan knew very well that his clan’s entire total net worth was only around a hundred million gold coins, and most of that net worth was bound up in illiquid assets. Their liquid assets were, at most, around twenty million gold coins or so. The clan couldn’t possibly waste all of their liquid reserves on a single sculpture.

It was already very kind of the clan to not force Kalan and Alice to separate.

“5.3 million gold!” Someone in another second-level booth made a bid.

That golden-haired, middle-aged man began to grow excited. “5.3 million gold coins! The lowest valuation of one of the Ten Masterpieces was 5.28 million gold coins, but now, the list of the Ten Masterpieces has changed. I can formally announce that the sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, has officially joined the ranks of the Ten Masterpieces!”

“Young master Yale of the Dawson Conglomerate bids six million gold coins!” Austoni once again announced from the third level.

Upon hearing this price, Kalan’s face was beginning to turn black.

The price had reached six million gold coins so quickly. This truly had exceeded Kalan’s expectations. Based on Kalan’s predictions, given that the cheapest of the Ten Masterpieces was valued at 5.28 million gold coins, the eight million gold coins he had prepared should have been more than enough.

But...

Kalan wasn't a true collector. He didn't have a deep understanding of the field of stonesculpting.

Those true connoisseurs could totally sense the unique, soul-stirring aura of this sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', especially when viewing all five images together. Such a thing was extremely rare. In the entire history of the Yulan continent, there had never been a case of five figures carved into a single sculpture, especially in such a manner as to evoke a sad, beautiful feeling in the viewer.

What's more, the sculptor was only sixteen years old when this was completed. And he was a genius magus!

"I cannot allow the price to continue rising like this." Kalan frowned.

He knew that if the price continued to rise slowly, his chances of winning the auction would grow slimmer and slimmer.

"Eight million gold coins!" Kalan's loud voice announced his bid.

From six million gold coins to eight million gold coins. A sudden increase of two million gold coins. This sort of explosive increase was enough to stun everyone present. After all, even the Ten Masterpieces were only worth so much. Even those three precious sculptures by Proulx were only worth around seven million gold each.

True collectors didn't collect just for the sake of collecting; they had a keen eye for value as well.

Otherwise, if they just wildly threw their money around, they would bankrupt the clan.

The golden-haired, middle-aged man immediately shouted loudly, "The Debs clan bids eight million gold coins! Such a nice, tidy, neat increase to eight million gold coins. From this, one can tell that they are determined to win this auction for this sculpture! I can already imagine how, in the future, once Master Linley becomes a Saint-level combatant, this sculpture's price will no longer just be eight million gold coins. Most likely, by then, it will be worth sixteen million gold coins!"

This golden-haired man's promotion ability was really very fierce.

But none of those who were present were fools. All of them were pondering...after all, even if they had money, it had to be spent in a meaningful way.

....

On the third level of the auction hall, Linley, Yale, King Clayde, Cardinal Guillermo, and Cardinal Lampson were all engaged in idle chatter and laughter as they watched the below events.

“Third Bro, that Kalan has made his bid.” Yale said in a low voice.

Linley couldn’t help but turn to look at Kalan’s booth. He could clearly see Kalan holding hands with Alice inside their booth. Judging from Kalan’s expression, he was very agitated.

“Third Bro, let me give him a bit of pressure. No matter what, we can’t allow your sculpture to fall into his hands.” Yale said in a soft voice.

“No need.” Linley slowly shook his head.

Linley was staring directly at Alice. Sitting there in the booth, Alice looked like a pitiable little girl who had suffered some sort of mistreatment. All of the other members of the Debs clan were looking at Alice with a hint of dissatisfaction in their eyes. After all, their clan was spending an enormous amount of money for Alice’s sake.

“If they really want it, let them have it.” Linley said emotionlessly.

Sitting next to him, Guillermo and Lampson exchanged glances, then chuckled.

.....

Within the private booth.

All the members of the Debs clan were feeling very nervous. But of course, Alice and Kalan were the most nervous of all.

“Relax, Alice. Eight million gold coins is already an extremely high price. It won’t get any higher.” Kalan comforted Alice...but who was going to console him? Because the clan had only authorized him to bid up to eight million gold.

That golden-haired middle-aged man lifted up a small hammer. “The Debs clan has bid eight million gold. Is anyone going to outbid them? If not...I am going to begin the countdown.”

“Ten million gold.”

A rather lazy voice sounded out from one of the seats in the middle of the first level. Up till now, virtually all of the bids for this sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, had come from those extremely powerful clans seated in the second level. They were

the ones who were really engaged in this bidding war. Those nobles sitting below were just there to watch the excitement. Nobody expected one of them to make a bid as well.

“None of you have any insight. From what I can tell, this ‘Awakening From the Dream’ can be considered to be the start of an entirely new style of stonesculpting. Its carving style is totally different from every other sculpture, and what’s more, it has five images with totally unique yet connecting auras. It definitely is worth ten million gold coins.” That man who bid ten million gold coins said casually.

From the loose, baggy long robes of this thirty to forty year old man, everyone could sense his lazy, indolent nature.

“Ten million gold coins?”

Within their private booth, Alice and Kalan were both stunned.

Chapter 16

“Big brother Kalan.” Alice called out in a low voice, while looking at him with urgency in her eyes.

Perhaps others would feel pride at being the inspiration for a Grandmaster-level sculpture. But this ‘Awakening From the Dream’ of Linley’s was different. Anyone who had ever spent any time analyzing sculptures would be easily be able to tell from the aura given off by those five figures that there was a romantic history between Linley and Alice.

If Alice had just married into a small clan, that wouldn’t be as much of an issue.

But...she was marrying into the clan of Kalan Debs.

Kalan was the future successor to the leadership of the Debs clan, and the Debs clan was one of the top three clans of the entire Kingdom of Fenlai.

“Calm down, calm down.” Kalan comfortingly held Alice’s hand.

But Alice could feel that Kalan’s hand was covered in sweat.

“Father...” Kalan turned towards his father, Bernard, then looked at his mother. His parents both doted on him exceedingly, which was why they were willing to spend

eight million gold coins on Kalan's behalf. After all, even to the Debs clan, eight million gold coins was an exceedingly large sum.

"Kalan, don't even think about it. The clan can't possibly hand over ten million gold coins just for the sake of your fiancée." Bernard said, his face extremely solemn.

Kalan was stunned. Even Alice turned her head to look at Bernard, her eyes filled with worry and a hint of supplication.

"We'll act in accordance with our previous discussion." Bernard totally ignored Alice's silent appeal as he coldly pronounced his judgment.

Kalan froze for a long moment, while by his side, Alice tightly clutched his hands, staring into Kalan's eyes. Alice fully understood what Bernard meant by his words just now. Alice was extremely unwilling to accept this result.

Kalan glanced at Alice. He let out a helpless sigh, then slightly shook his head.

"Big brother Kalan, I'm not willing..." Alice said in a small voice.

Kalan clasped Alice's hands. He gently shook his head again. "There's no other way. Alice...I am the heir to our clan. I have to put the considerations of the clan first. I hope you are willing to sacrifice a little bit for me as well. I promise you that my heart towards you will never waver."

Alice fell silent.

The heir to the clan!

These five simple words guaranteed that every single action of Kalan's would reflect upon the honor and glory of the Debs clan. Although Bernard loved and doted on his son very much, no matter what, he could not permit Alice to become Kalan's principal wife.

That's right. There was no way she could become the principal wife.

In other words, any children which Alice bore Kalan in the future would not be able to become a heir, or be considered to be direct line of descent.

In truth, ever since the 'Awakening From the Dream' had been viewed by many people, the elders of the Debs clan had been constantly urging Kalan to give up Alice. Even if Kalan insisted on marrying her, they didn't wish for Alice to become his principal wife. But Kalan had remained steadfast.

In the end, Bernard, the doting father, compromised. He decided that if they were able to purchase this 'Awakening From the Dream', then this matter would more or less be at an end.

But from the looks of it...

"Big brother Kalan!" Alice looked at Kalan, her eyes turning moist. At the same time, she turned to look at the other members of the Debs clan. But at this moment, neither Kalan, nor Bernard, nor Kalan's mother, paid Alice any mind.

At that moment, Alice felt her heart grow cold.

She suddenly thought back to everything she had experienced with Linley, how Linley had protected her and unstintingly cherished her. In the past, she had always taken Linley's constant yielding to her for granted, but at this moment, how she longed for that feeling!

Raising her head, her gaze passed through the glass window to stare at the third level. But all she could see was the black glass.

"Ten million gold! Ten million gold! Is anyone willing to bid higher?" That golden-haired man was calling out from the platform.

The man dressed in the loose robes casually glanced around. And then, he directly addressed that golden-haired auctioneer. "Hey, stop wasting time. Hurry up and start counting." The nobles nearby all began to laugh.

How could an auctioneer possibly obey the commands of one of the bidders below?

Based on their understanding of this golden-haired auctioneer, they knew him to be someone who would constantly escalate the bidding wars until the price reached an extremely high level.

But upon hearing the words of the man in the loose robes, the auctioneer seemed to have been hypnotized. Very naturally, he said, "Okay, then I'll start counting! Three, two..."

"10.1 million gold coins!"

An ancient-sounding voice rang out from one of the second-level private booths.

Everyone's attention turned towards that booth. Even that man dressed in the loose robes turned to stare at that booth in astonishment. In that second level booth, aside

from the Debs clan, every single clan present was one of the major, world-spanning clans of the Yulan continent.

The wealth of those clans was far higher than that of the Debs clan.

“Whoah, so there’s someone here who appreciates value after all. But raising it by just 100,000 is a bit too stingy. 10.3 million gold coins.” The man in the loose robes said casually, grinning.

Linley and the others on the third level all noticed the man in the loose robes now, but from their current angle, they could only see the man from the side, and were unable to see his face clearly.

“Hrm?”

Cardinal Guillermo and Cardinal Lampson of the Radiant Church both suddenly rose to their feet. Frowns on their face, they walked to the opposite end of the glass, carefully looking down at the loosely-attired man below.

Just at that moment...

The loosely robed man seemed to have discovered the presence of the two Cardinals, as he raised his head upwards and glanced towards them.

“Him?”

The faces of the two Cardinals suddenly turned bone white.

Guillermo and Lampson exchanged glances, then they both shook their heads. In truth, the Radiant Church had already come to a decision about this auction. They had decided to spend a very large sum of money to purchase this sculpture, and thus improve the relationship between them and Linley.

But upon seeing this man, both Guillermo and Lampson silently decided to change their course of action.

“It’s best that we not get into a bidding war with this madman.” Cardinal Guillermo said softly.

Cardinal Lampson nodded as well. “I definitely don’t want to agitate that madman either.”

Although they both referred to this person as a ‘madman’, the fear they felt towards him was fear which was etched into their bones. Both Lampson and Guillermo were

very much aware as to how terrifying that thirty or forty year old man could be. Lampson, in particular...

Because if it wasn't for this madman, Lampson probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to be promoted to the rank of Cardinal.

There were only five Cardinals at any time within the Radiant Church. Precisely because this madman had casually killed one of the previous Cardinals, Lampson had the opportunity to be promoted to his current position. But even though he had killed a Cardinal, the Holy Emperor was still unwilling to be enemies with this madman.

"10.4 million gold coins." That old voice rang out once again from the second level.

The loosely robed old man raised his head up, glancing up with a frown. "You really are irritating. 11 million gold coins."

"11 million, this gentleman is willing to bid 11 million gold coins. Is anyone willing to bid any higher?" That golden-haired auctioneer was growing excited. After all, even the 'Bloody-eyed Maned Lion' sculpture, the greatest of the Ten Masterpieces, was only worth 13 million.

On the third level, Guillermo asked Lampson quietly, "Lampson. Do you know which clan is situated in that booth? They actually dare to struggle with that madman? Are they tired of living?"

"Director Maia." Lampson called over Director Maia, seated not too far from them.

Director Maia immediately came over.

"Director Maia. Do you know which clan is located within that booth?" Lampson asked. "The one where the leader is a young woman, I believe." Being on the third level, Lampson naturally could see the people seated on the sofas in the second level booths.

As for that elderly man, he seemed to be that woman's servant.

Director Maia took a glance, then laughed. "Lord Lampson. Lord Guillermo. This young lady is a female in the principal line of inheritance for the Leon clan of the Yulan Empire. This booth was reserved under the name of the Leon clan."

"The Leon clan?" Lampson and Guillermo were both startled.

In the Yulan Empire, the most ancient Empire in the Yulan continent, the Leon clan was ranked fifth amongst the major clans. A clan which could rank in the top five of the Yulan Empire was capable of easily destroying the Debs clan.

What's more, the majority of the descendants of the Leon clan all lived within the Yulan Empire, and thus in the Yulan Empire, they had an enormous web of influence.

"Guillermo, I believe that in our Ernst Institute, there was someone formerly known as the number one genius of the Institute by the name of 'Dixie'. He seems to be from the Yulan Empire's Leon clan, correct?" Lampson asked.

Guillermo was comparatively more familiar with the affairs of the Ernst Institute.

"Right, and not just Dixie. He has a sister as well, whose name I can't recall. These two siblings both requested to be allowed to study at our Ernst Institute. Just a few days ago, though, this Dixie applied to graduate." Guillermo directly revealed what he knew.

Lampson nodded as well.

"Seems like this girl is Dixie's younger sister." Lampson looked towards that booth.

Within the Leon booth in the second level. Dressed in violet and blue, and seated on the sofa, Delia had a tranquil expression on her face. Through the window, she stared down at the sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'.

"Miss, stop fighting. That person below isn't someone that you can afford to anger." The old man was beginning to grow frantic.

As one of the elite clans of the Yulan Empire, the Leon clan was very clear as to the various super experts as well as hidden powers. They knew very well that although they were an elite clan, there were some people whom they simply could not afford to offend.

For example...that thirty or forty year old man below.

The old man knew very well that although he himself was already four hundred years old, even before he had been born, the loosely attired man below looked the way he currently did.

"Don't worry, Grandpa Shaw [Xiu]. Just help me send this letter to him, ok?" Delia took out a pen and quickly wrote a few words down on a piece of paper, before handing it to this old man.

The old man received the piece of paper. Upon seeing its contents, he was stunned.

"Miss, you...this..." The old man was totally flabbergasted by this letter.

"Don't worry about it. Just hand this letter to him." Delia didn't hesitate in the slightest. The old man did, but after a moment, he still left the booth and headed to the first floor.

"12 million gold coins!"

Delia's clear voice rang out from within the booth.

The loosely attired man below frowned, and a baleful aura seemed to gather between his furrowed brows. But just at this moment, the old man named 'Shaw' walked over to the loosely attired man. Upon reaching his side, he respectfully bowed. "Milord, I am a servant of the Leon clan. This is the letter my young mistress has sent to you."

Furrowing his brows with surprise, the loosely attired man accepted the letter with some curiosity.

"Uh..." Upon seeing the contents of the letter, the loosely attired man's eyes lit up, and then he began to laugh.

"Fine, fine, I won't fight it, I won't fight it." The letter in the loosely robed man's hands turned directly to dust, and then he sat back down again, grinning. He even raised his head to look up at Delia, seated on the sofa within her booth on the second level.

At this moment, within the third level of the auction hall.

Upon hearing that clear voice call out the words '12 million gold', both Linley and Yale were stunned. That voice was simply too familiar. Linley had known the owner of that voice since the first day he had entered the Ernst Institute.

"It's Delia." Yale said with amazement.

Linley immediately walked forward towards the glass, to a vantage point where he could look into Delia's booth. Indeed, Delia was dressed in a conservative violet outfit and seated on a sofa, staring at the sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'.

"Three...two...one..." "Bang!"

The golden-haired man slammed the mallet down, then excitedly called out, "Congratulations to the Leon family for using 12 million gold coins to win this

auction and acquire this sculpture of Master Linley's. I now have the honor of announcing that this sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', has the third highest price amongst the Ten Masterpieces. Only Master Hoover's 'Bloody-eyed Maned Lion' and Master Proulx's 'Hope' have valuations surpassing that of 'Awakening From the Dream'."

The entire auction hall began to be filled with commotion, and a raucous applause could be heard as well.

But Linley continued to stand there, next to the window on the third level, staring at Delia. And then, he turned to look at Alice, seated in the other booth. Both of these women were seated on sofas, but on Delia's face, there was a hint of a smile, while Alice's face was drained of all color.

Chapter 17

Both sides of the auction hall were filled with wealthy nobles. The groups of nobles separated into two sides in order to open a corridor for the departure of the Cardinals Guillermo and Lampson of the Radiant Church, King Clayde of Fenlai, Director Maia of the Proulx Gallery, young master Yale of the Dawson Conglomerate, and of course, the genius magus and genius sculptor, Master Linley.

These people walked in the middle corridor, chatting and laughing amongst themselves as they headed towards the exit of the Proulx Gallery.

"Lord Guillermo. Lord Lampson."

"Your Majesty."

"Master Linley."

.....

All of the surrounding nobles and magnates were smiling and greeting them with modesty and goodwill. The Debs clan, however, had been squeezed into a corner. Her head covered firmly by her hat, Alice couldn't help but to raise her head and take a peek at Linley, who was buried within a sea of well-wishing nobles and magnates.

In this day and age, Linley had become a legendary genius.

A seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank whose achievements in the field of sculpture rivaled that of Proulx, Hope Jensen, Hoover, and the other Grandmasters. A genius such as he was would naturally be viewed as the most glittering star in the sky, worthy of everyone's admiration. Slowly, the two Cardinals, King Clayde, Linley, Yale, and the others disappeared in the distance.

Only then did all of the nobles and wealthy moguls leave as well.

"You must be Alice." A clear voice suddenly rang out.

Several members of the Debs clan looked behind them into the hall.

A beautiful, golden-haired woman walked over to them, while by her side was an old man with a warm smile on his face. But both this woman and the old servant had an aura of nobility that emanated from their bones, naturally making others feel inferior to them.

Seeing her, Bernard immediately said modestly, "Lord Shaw, this must be Miss Delia. I've long heard that the Leon clan's legendary Miss Delia is so devastatingly beautiful that she can cause the downfall of a kingdom. Today, upon seeing her, I must say that she is even more beautiful than the legend."

The influence of the Debs clan was limited to the Kingdom of Fenlai. Compared to the continent-spanning Leon clan, they were incomparably minute.

"Oh, clan leader Bernard of the Debs clan?" Delia glanced at Bernard.

Bernard modestly nodded.

"And this must be your son Kalan's fiancée, correct?" Delia looked at Alice, who was hiding behind Kalan.

Bernard immediately smiled. "Her? No, she's not the principal wife of my son Kalan."

"Not the principal wife?" A cold smile appeared on the face of Delia, and she slowly walked towards Alice. Bernard didn't dare to block her way. When Delia neared Kalan, Kalan actually puffed out his chest and tried to courageously block her path.

But when he met Delia's frosty gaze, Kalan suddenly felt his heart grow cold.

When he reminded himself that this was a young mistress of the Leon clan, Kalan felt all the more uneasy. Right now, the relationship between the Debs clan and the Dawson Conglomerate was already terrible. If they offended the Leon clan as well...it would be simply too easy for the Leon clan to deal with the Debs clan.

"Alice." Delia stared into Alice's eyes.

Alice raised her head, forcing herself to match Delia's gaze, doing her best to calm her beating heart.

But Delia only laughed. In a soft voice, she said, "Alice...I really don't know why Linley fell for you?" Alice's face grew pale, but she replied, "That's none of your business!"

"None of my business?" Delia let out a calm chuckle. "Right. It's none of my business. But I really feel pity for you. You actually gave up Linley, but the result of that was? You aren't even going to be a principal wife within this Debs clan. I imagine you feel regret...but unfortunately, you'll never have that chance again. Because a person like you will never, ever have the chance to interact with Linley again. In the future, you two will belong in different worlds. Do you understand?"

Delia totally ignored the ugly look on Kalan's face, and she turned directly to look at Bernard.

"Forgive me for disturbing you." Delia said extremely courteously.

Bernard immediately bowed modestly. "Miss Delia, by your leave."

That old man by Delia's side cast a look at Kalan, who still had that ugly look on his face. With a cold sneer, he followed Delia out. But Bernard continued to watch them leave with a courteous smile on his face. Only after Delia and her servant had left did he turn, fixing Alice and Kalan with a deadly glare.

"Absolutely disgraceful!" Bernard viciously snapped at them.

Neither Kalan nor Alice dared to make a sound. Under this aura of oppressiveness, the Debs clan returned home.

.....

Within the Lucas clan's mansion in Fenlai City.

"Master Linley, no, no, there's no need." Marquis Jebbs was hurriedly trying to refuse Linley. "There's really no need for the 600,000 gold coins. Master Linley, I am so incredibly sorry. I really had no idea that you had reached such an incredible level in the field of sculpting."

Jebbs, that obstinate old man. Right now, when he looked at Linley, his eyes were filled with something akin to veneration for an idol.

Marquis Jebbs didn't have many hobbies. The one thing he loved to do was collect items.

Naturally, he felt deep veneration for those Grandmaster-level artisans of each field. Perhaps even if the King of Fenlai was present, he wouldn't feel as much awe as he did now towards Linley.

"How about let's just name the price at 180,000 gold, is that fine? My clan originally bought it for 180,000 gold coins, so that would still be fair. Master Linley, I really am not willing to make money off of you. If I took advantage and earned money from you, Master Linley, I wouldn't be able to sleep well at night."

That adorable old man, Master Marquis, was extremely stubborn.

"Marquis Jebbs, in the past, when your Lucas clan bought this warblade 'Slaughterer' from my clan, the price you paid was 180,000 gold coins, true. But after all these centuries, due to inflation, the 180,000 gold coins you paid then is worth much more now." Linley wasn't willing to take advantage of the Lucas clan either.

But Marquis Jebbs only stubbornly stared at Linley.

"Haha, you guys...you guys are just so..." Next to them, Yale was laughing so hard that he was clutching his belly. "The seller is frantically trying to lower his product's price, and would rather give it away for free. But the buyer is trying to raise the price higher. I have never seen something like this before."

Linley let out a helpless laugh as well. "Marquis Jebbs, how about this. Centuries ago, that 180,000 gold coins had a purchasing power comparable to around 360,000 gold in this era. Let's just go with 360,000 gold coins. Don't refuse any longer! If you do, I'll just throw down my magicrystal card and leave."

Linley withdrew his magicrystal card from his breast pocket.

Marquis Jebbs looked unhappily at Linley, but finally nodded. "Fine, then."

Linley couldn't help but laugh.

Marquis Jebbs suddenly laughed a bit shyly as well. "Master Linley, I have a small favor to ask, if I might?"

"Go ahead." Linley laughed, looking at the Marquis.

Marquis Jebbs gestured at his servants, who quickly carried over an erect stone tablet from deeper within his mansion.

“Master Linley, I only hope that you can put your signature on this tablet. If you do, I will treasure this forever.” Marquis Jebbs looked at Linley with hopeful eyes.

Linley chuckled, then withdrew his straight chisel from his breast pocket.

With a casual flick of the wrist, the chisel began to fly about in a blur as stone dust began to fall off from that stone tablet. In the time it took to take three breaths, Linley was finished and withdrew his chisel. Gently blowing air on the tablet, all of the remaining dust flew away from it, revealing a name artistically written, as though it were a flying dragon or a dancing phoenix.

LINLEY

Staring at that word, Marquis Jebbs’ eyes were shining. “What an elegant carving technique, and what beautiful letters. This word is far more valuable than 360,000 gold coins.”

Hearing this, Linley didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry.

.....

On the road from Fenlai City to Wushan township, the path was lined with redwood trees on either side. Riding a large stallion, Linley was galloping forward with a huge case on his back. This case was several hundred pounds heavy. Fortunately, this stallion was a particularly fine one that had been provided by the Dawson Conglomerate. Normal horses wouldn’t be able to move quickly when carrying such a burden.

Behind Linley, a troop of over a hundred Knights was following him.

This troop had been gifted to Linley by the Radiant Church via Cardinal Lampson and Cardinal Guillermo. What the Radiant Church claimed was that Linley’s safety was of paramount importance to them, which could be seen from the recent abduction attempt. The weakest member of this troop was a warrior of the fifth rank. It belonged to one of the ace regiments of the Knights of the Radiant Temple.

Over a hundred warhorses galloped behind, kicking up a cloud of dust.

From far away, the image of Wushan township drew closer and closer to Linley’s sight. In his mind, he couldn’t help but think back to the events of his youth, such as the training he had undergone in the training grounds, as well as that terrifying sight of the Velocidragon.

In the past, in Linley's eyes, a Velocidragon was the symbol of utter invincibility. But now, to Linley, a Velocidragon was no longer much of anything.

"Rumble, rumble."

The earth shook as this troop of elite knights and warhorses continued on their way. The shudders could be felt from far away.

"What a mighty troop."

While walking in the middle of Wushan township, Hillman couldn't help but turn and stare. The sound of the hoof steps was orderly, fast and forceful, striking fear into Hillman's heart. Even when he was in the army, he had never encountered such a high-quality force of knights.

The lowest of the knights present was a warrior of the fifth rank. How could a troop belonging to one of the ace regiments of the Radiant Church be of low quality?

The sound of their warhorses galloping alone could strike fear into many.

"Who is that?" Hillman instantly saw that there was a person riding ahead of the troop.

"Linley." The expression on Hillman's face changed, and he quickly ran at high speed towards the Baruch clan manor.

After entering the bounds of Wushan township proper, Linley instructed his troop of knights to lower their speeds. Linley, only, continued to move at a relatively fast speed towards his clan's manor. Seeing from afar that vine-wrapped, scarred wall, Linley thought back to one event after another of his youth.

"The Baruch clan, my roots, my foundation!" Carrying the warblade, 'Slaughterer', on his back, Linley's heart was filled with pride.

Linley could still clearly remember, the first time he had left for the Ernst Institute, what his father had said to him. Linley believed that he would never, ever forget these words from his father.

"Linley, remember the centuries long desire of generations of Baruch elders. Remember the shame of the Baruch clan!"

"After graduating, you will at least be a magus of the sixth rank. As long as you train hard, becoming a magus of the seventh rank shouldn't be too hard. In the future,

you will definitely have the ability to regain our clan's ancestral heirloom. If you fail to do so, even in death, I will not forgive you."

"Even in death, I will not forgive you!"

.....

That voice reverberated in Linley's mind. But this time, feeling the weight of the 'Slaughterer' on his back, Linley only felt a surge of pride.

"Father, I'm coming back"!

"Father, I have brought back our warblade, 'Slaughterer'!"

Linley flew off his horse's back and directly charged into his clan's courtyard.

"Father!" Linley shouted loudly.

"I'm back! I brought the warblade 'Slaughterer' back!" Linley was filled with joy and excitement. The elders of his clan had labored for centuries. His father had pined for it his entire life. And now, he had finally fulfilled his father's desire!

"The warblade, 'Slaughterer'?" A voice rang out.

Linley turned and looked behind him. It was Hillman.

"Uncle Hillman, where's father? Quick, have him come out. Haha, I've finally brought back the warblade 'Slaughterer'. Honest! I have the ancestral heirloom of our Dragonblood Warrior clan. I've finally brought it back. Quick, tell me where my father is. Once my father finds out, he will be so ecstatic. Tonight, we are absolutely going to get drunk. Uncle Hillman, don't worry, tonight, I'm not going to shirk my duty. I'll definitely get drunk with you. If we aren't drunk, we won't stop!"

Linley was so excited, he continued to babble without stopping. He even removed the case from his back, holding it in his arms as he stared at Uncle Hillman.

But....

There was no hint of joy in Hillman's face. In fact, there was a hint of misery.

"Un...Uncle Hillman?" Linley began to frown. Staring at Uncle Hillman, he said, "Uncle Hillman, where is my father?"

Looking at Linley, Hillman forced out a smile. "Linley, you've brought back the warblade, 'Slaughterer'? If your father knew, he definitely would be ecstatic. Definitely."

"Where is my father?"

"Your father. He. He passed away three months ago." Hillman took a deep breath, then finally, slowly said these words. As he did, his eyes turned moist.

Linley suddenly felt as though countless thunderbolts had went off by his ears. His brain went blank.

"CLANG!"

The case in Linley's hands fell heavily to the ground. The lid to the case flew open, revealing a giant warblade which emanated a killing aura and was tinted with a slight, bloody red color. That cold, killing aura and that bloody aura filled the entire hall in an instant.

"Dead?"

Linley stared disbelievingly at Hillman.

Hillman nodded slightly.

Suddenly, Linley laughed. "Haha, Uncle Hillman, you must be lying to me. Haha, I've brought back the warblade 'Slaughterer'. Look, Uncle Hillman, I've brought back the warblade 'Slaughterer'. How could my father be dead? He is going to view this warblade first."

With one hand, Linley reached out and picked up the warblade 'Slaughterer'. Instantly, that bloody aura filled even Hillman's heart with trepidation.

"Uncle Hillman, look. I brought back the 'Slaughterer'. And I have to tell my father that I am now capable of transforming into a Dragonblood Warrior." Scales began forming around Linley's hands, and in a short while, Linley's hands transformed into draconic claws.

Grabbing onto Hillman's shoulders with his two draconic claws, Linley stared into Hillman's eyes. "Uncle Hillman, look, I can already transform into a Dragonblood Warrior. I've brought home the warblade 'Slaughterer' to our clan. It's true. Where is father? My father!"

"I am going to show the warblade 'Slaughterer' to him!"

"I haven't yet had the chance to tell him that I can become a Dragonblood Warrior!"

Those draconic claws gripped Hillman by the shoulders, but the owner of those claws, Linley, stared beseechingly into Hillman's eyes.

"Uncle Hillman, I'm begging you, tell me, where is my father?" Like a poor, lost orphan child, Linley stared at Hillman, his eyes begging. Like a drowning man clutching at a stalk of grass, Linley clutched at Hillman.

Hillman gently shook his head. "Linley, your father...is dead!"

Linley laughed. Laughed so desolately. "No...no way. I have to show him the warblade 'Slaughterer'. I have to tell him that I can transform into a Dragonblood Warrior. And tonight, I'm going to drink wine with him."

As he spoke, tears began to cover Linley's face.

Staring at Linley, Hillman couldn't help but lower his face, and then two rivers of tears began to flow down his own face.

"Impossible. Impossible!"

Gripping onto Hillman fiercely with his two claws, Linley stared a deathly stare at Hillman. His eyes even took on that same, icy, dark golden color of the Armored Razorback Wurm. The entire hall was suddenly filled with a baleful aura that was even more terrifying than the one emitted by the warblade 'Slaughterer'.

A low, hoarse growl emitted from Linley's throat...

"Tell me....where is my father?"

[End of Book 05]